

ON THE ROAD TO PEACE

Peace Education as a driver for Positive Peace in post-agreement
Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Although present since time immemorial, violence, unlike conflict, is not to be seen as a natural element of human interactions. It needs, instead, to be countered and replaced by a culture of peace. In November 2016, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP) signed an historical peace agreement that officially put an end to a conflict that lasted over half a century. To make the deal a reality, however, it is necessary to promote a wide societal transformation, so that the perception of violence as the normality is halted and positive peace can flourish. This is an endeavour of an education for peace. This thesis sustains that a true process of change is that which involves all agents of society and empowers children not only as peaceful human beings but also as peacebuilders. It has, thus, chosen an innovative educational model, named *Escuela Nueva*, as a case-study, for it has been widely recognised for its effectiveness in promoting social transformation and a culture of peace in Colombia. In accordance, it is herein highlighted the model’s component of community involvement and analysed, through surveys, its students’ capacity to actively participate in the construction of peace. This research, therefore, advocates that an education for peace with a component of peacebuilding is essential to ensure that the peace initiative in Colombia prospers and that a sustainable future is guaranteed.

Key-words: positive peace; peace education; peacebuilding; Colombia.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUC	United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EFA	Education for All
ELN	National Liberation Army
EPL	Popular Liberation Army
FARC-EP	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army
FEN	<i>Fundación Escuela Nueva – Volvamos a La Gente</i>
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KAS	Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills
M-19	19 th of April Movement
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NOREF	Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2016, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the Declaration on the Right to Peace, acknowledging, in its first article, that “everyone has the right to enjoy peace such that all human rights are promoted and protected and development is fully realized”.¹

Although the pathway towards fulfilling this right at a global level has been proven to be long and tortuous, there are still many who dedicate their lives to the pursue of change. Various researchers, politicians, educators and economists believe that, to achieve sustainability, it is essential to nourish in people’s minds a culture of peace, which, according to the United Nations (UN), consists of

values, attitudes and behaviours that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full exercise of all right and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society.²

Maria Montessori, a widely recognised Italian doctor and educational theorist, wrote once that “preventing conflicts is the work of politics, establishing peace is the work of education”.³ Following that line of thought, a culture of peace entails too the commitment to an education capable of transforming worldviews, in other words, a commitment to an education for peace.⁴

In November 2016, the Colombian government, led by Juan Manuel Santos, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*, FARC-EP) signed an historical peace agreement that officially put an end to a conflict that lasted over half a century.

¹ UNGA, A/HRC/32/L.18, Declaration on the Right to Peace, 24 June 2016, Art. 1.

² UNGA, A/RES/52/13, Culture of peace, 15 January 1998.

³ Montessori, n.d., quoted in: Atlanta Montessori International School (online), n.d., *Campus*.

⁴ UNESCO, 1995.

To bring about actual change and establish a peace that can “stand the test of time”,⁵ it is ever so urgent to commit to an education capable of providing “the foundation for post-war reconstruction, foster tolerance, generate respect for human rights, and break the grinding cycle of poverty”.⁶ For if not “taking education into account, the peace initiative in Colombia is at serious risk of only producing short-term gains”.⁷

Ergo, the present thesis draws attention to the role of **peace education as a driver for positive peace in post-agreement Colombia.**

The research is divided in three chapters. The first, named ‘A Theoretical Perspective’, upholds the framework necessary to comprehend the following units. Therein, the reader is provided with a comprehensive definition of peace, peacebuilding and peace education, the three key concepts present throughout the document. Chapter two, in turn, entails an overview of the conflict in Colombia as well as an analysis to the country’s peace process. This section aims, thusly, to offer a better understanding of the complexity of the context chosen by this thesis. Lastly, chapter three includes the case-study of *Escuela Nueva* (‘New School’), an innovative educational model, first developed in Colombia, which has been widely praised by its efficiency in promoting social transformation and a culture of peace. This final part establishes a link between peace education and peacebuilding in practice, therefore, containing this thesis’ added value to the academic world and the general public.

Accordingly, the present research aims to find the answers to the questions: (1) Can peace education be a driver for positive peace in post-agreement Colombia?; (a) Can peace education programmes involving children lead to the active participation of all society members?; and (b) Can peace education programmes empower children as peacebuilders?.

⁵ García, 2016.

⁶ Price, n.d., p.100.

⁷ Chaux & Velásquez, 2009, pp.159-172.

1. A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.

Constitution of UNESCO (1945)

Peace and conflict researchers are known to not always agree with each other. In fact, the very nature of the discipline has been the source of some debate.⁸ However, the notion that “conflict is an inseparable part of social interactions”⁹ has been widely accepted.

Generally perceived as a negative occurrence, conflict is not but, as John Paul Lederach puts it, “a normal and continuous dynamic within human relationships”¹⁰ that can bring about positive change. Violence, on the other hand, is a concept of a negative connotation that, although present in history since time immemorial, is not inevitable. Today, the challenges it poses are massive and demand, evermore, a constructive response to conflict.

It is with this earnestness in mind that this research underlines the importance of spreading a culture of peace, through peacebuilding and peace education initiatives,

for, in reality, the cause of war does not lie in armaments, but in the men who make use of them. If man had grown up with a healthy soul enjoying the full development of a strong character and of a clear intellect, he could [not] have endured to be simultaneously the upholder of two kinds of justice, the one protecting life and the other destroying it, nor would he have consented to cultivate in his heart both love and hatred.¹¹

1.1. A comprehensive understanding of peace

Johan Galtung, renowned pioneer of Peace Studies, was the first to conceptualise violence

⁸ Research School on Peace and Conflict (online), 2016, *Cyprus course on peace and conflict*.

⁹ Azar, 1990, p.5.

¹⁰ Lederach, 2003.

¹¹ Montessori, 1943, p.25.

and peace in a comprehensive manner. He affirmed that, by adopting a narrow concept of the first, the latter, as its absence, would cancel out very little.¹²

Violence, according to the Norwegian researcher, is

the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or, to put it in more general terms, the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible.¹³

In essence, in his understanding, violence is invariably an unnecessary action that has a negative impact on basic human needs, a concept defined by Gasper as “whatever people require to be able to achieve a level of functioning that satisfies a given ethical conception of the acceptable minimum”.¹⁴

In his landmark publication of 1969, *Violence, Peace and Peace Research*, Galtung stressed the distinction between direct and structural violence, to which he added, in 1990, the concept of cultural violence.¹⁵ A typology of three different and interrelated forms of violence was, then, established by the author.

The first, direct violence, refers to deliberate actions that endanger one’s life or hinders the fulfilment of one’s fundamental human needs, such as beating or killing,¹⁶ whereas structural violence is that which is embedded in social arrangements and hampers individuals from having equal opportunities to meet their needs.¹⁷ Galtung also refers to it as social injustice, for it mirrors the unequal distribution of resources and, most importantly, of power.¹⁸ Paul Farmer, a medical anthropologist and physician, has described it as the form of violence “visited upon all those whose social status denies

¹² Galtung, 1969, p.168.

¹³ Galtung, 1993, p.106.

¹⁴ Gasper, 2004, p.1.

¹⁵ Galtung, 1969; Galtung, 1990.

¹⁶ Harvard Divinity School (online), n.d., *Typologies of Violence and Peace*.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Galtung, 1969, p. 171.

them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress”.¹⁹ Embodied by undesirable conditions, such as inequality or repression, structural violence does not necessarily involve an identified perpetrator. This type of violence is rather silent and static, while the first is visible and variable in time.²⁰ Cultural violence, in turn, represents the social norms that are used to justify the former types.

Naturally, all three forms are interconnected and the flow goes from cultural violence through structural violence to direct violence.²¹ In other words, culture teaches one to accept social injustice or not to notice it at all and, then, direct violence emerges, whether by the underdogs who want to break out of the structural “iron cage”²² or by those in power who wish to keep it as it is.²³ In sum, the root causes of violence, embedded in social and cultural arrangements, must be addressed to prevent direct violence from occurring.²⁴

Given this comprehensive understanding of violence, what is then the definition of its opposing concept? In 1969, Galtung also brought in a broader conceptualisation of peace, dividing it into negative and positive peace.²⁵ The first is described as being merely the absence of direct violence, therefore, the negation of war, while the second, on the other hand, presupposes the absence of structural violence, meaning “social justice”.²⁶

With this comprehensive framework, the author makes a clear distinction between a concept in which peace is seen only as a matter of control and an attempt to reduce the use of force,²⁷ from one of “justice, in the sense of the full enjoyment of the entire range of human rights by all people”.²⁸

Ever since 1969, Galtung’s concepts of structural violence and positive peace have been

¹⁹ Farmer, n.d., quoted in: Structural Violence (online), n.d., *What is structural violence?*.

²⁰ Grewal, 2003.

²¹ Galtung, 1990, p. 295.

²² Weber, 1971, cited in: Galtung, 1990, p. 295.

²³ Galtung, 1990, p. 295.

²⁴ Steenkamp, 2014.

²⁵ Galtung, 1969.

²⁶ *ibid*, p.183.

²⁷ *ibid*.

²⁸ Reardon, 1988, p.26, cited in: Sandy & Perkins, 2008, p.3.

paid great attention in the field of peace research, that is still greatly focused on finding ways to address the social arrangements that breed violence.²⁹ Positive peace, in particular, has had a major impact on the fields of peacebuilding and conflict resolution.³⁰

In fact, the Global Peace Index (GPI), developed by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) as a mechanism to assess the level of peacefulness of the world's countries, includes a Positive Peace Framework based on eight different pillars.³¹ They are: a well-functioning government, a sound business environment, equitable distribution of resources, acceptance of the rights of others, good relations with neighbours, free flow of information, high levels of human capital and low levels of corruption.³² When combined, these highly interdependent attributes, not only uphold peace, but also create the space for human potential to thrive.³³ That is the epitome of Galtung's positive peace, said by some to be of such an idealistic nature that may never come to actually exist.³⁴

His understanding of violence as unjustified and avoidable was too targeted by critical voices. Namely, Parsons has considered it problematic, for he argues that violence is, sometimes, necessary to achieve social and political justice.³⁵ In turn, structural violence as a whole has been criticised for its focus on "structures and not protagonists"³⁶ as well as for its broadness.³⁷ The same American researcher has also pointed out that the concept works as an umbrella to a vast number of other undesirable conditions, such as inequality and repression, not allowing for a proper distinction.³⁸

In spite the criticisms, the current research will be applying Galtung's comprehensive definitions of violence and peace to the context of Colombia, for it sustains that such a complex reality deserves more than a black or white approach.

²⁹ Bonacker and Imbusch, 2005, p.141, cited in: Bräuchler, 2015.

³⁰ Steenkamp, 2014.

³¹ Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), 2015, pp.80-85.

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Steenkamp, 2014.

³⁵ Parsons, 2007, p.177.

³⁶ Bräuchler, 2015.

³⁷ Steenkamp, 2014; Keane, 1996, cited in: Steenkamp, 2014; Parsons, 2007.

³⁸ Parsons, 2007, p.177.

It is, indeed, true that peace, in its positive form, cannot be achieved solely through political or economic arrangements. Instead, it must be nourished in the minds of all human beings and “founded upon the intellectual moral and solidarity of mankind”.³⁹ This is, undoubtedly, not an easy task, but then again, it should not be taken as an impossible venture. In a world disproportionately dedicated to the art of war, where cultures of violence keep self-reproducing, there is an urgent need to remind people of how important it is to strive for a culture of peace, where everyone is a leading character.

The United Nations, in itself a reflection of a collective commitment to a culture of peace, has launched several initiatives to promote it. Namely, in 1997, it declared 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and, in 1998, the term 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.⁴⁰

By 1999, a Declaration and a Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace were adopted by the UN General Assembly and, recalling the definitions of the concept present in previous resolutions, eight points were integrated in the latter: (1) education for peace, (2) the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, (3) respect for human rights, (4) equality between women and men, (5) democratic participation, (6) tolerance, (7) the free flow of information and (8) disarmament.⁴¹

These focal points are considered to be the basis of a culture of peace and, therefore, need to be materialized. This is an endeavour of peacebuilding.

1.2. Peacebuilding

The concept was coined by Galtung in the seventies in a publication in which he stressed the need to find structures that can eliminate the root causes of war and provide alternatives to violence.⁴²

³⁹ Constitution of UNESCO, 1945.

⁴⁰ UNGA, A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, 6 October 1999.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Galtung, 1976, p.298.

Not long after the fall of the Iron Curtain, in order to readjust UN's response to conflicts and reaffirm its commitment towards peace, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then Secretary-General of the international organisation, published *An Agenda for Peace*, a report in which he introduced the word 'peacebuilding' into the United Nations' lexicon.⁴³

Therein, the UN chief describes preventive diplomacy as the action to avoid disputes from occurring, avert ongoing ones from developing into conflicts and prevent the latter from escalating when they erupt; peacemaking as the action to help the conflicting parties reaching an agreement; and peacekeeping as a technique involving a UN presence on the ground that is capable of preventing conflicts and building peace.⁴⁴ In turn, he characterises peacebuilding as the "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict".⁴⁵

An extended definition of the latter concept can be found in the Capstone Doctrine, a UN's guide on the planning and conduct of peacekeeping operations.

Peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to (1) reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by (2) strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and (3) to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. (4) Peacebuilding is a complex, long-term process of creating the necessary conditions for sustainable peace. (5) It works by addressing the deep-rooted, structural causes of violent conflict in a comprehensive manner. Peacebuilding measures address core issues that affect the functioning of society and the State, and seek to enhance the capacity of the State to effectively and legitimately carry out its core functions.⁴⁶

Such definition is important because it contains all the key components of peacebuilding. By deconstructing it, it becomes clear that it (1) aims to prevent violent conflicts from

⁴³ UNGA, A/47/277, *An Agenda for Peace*, 17 June 1992.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO), 2008, p.18.

erupting or re-erupting, (2) upholds that change must be held within the affected society and (3) promotes the eradication of all types of violence for the achievement of a positive peace (4) in the long-run, (5) by addressing the root causes of the conflict.

For its transformational essence, peacebuilding has become of vital importance for the international community. In fact, in 2005, a Peace Building Commission (PBC) was established in the UN as an advisory body of an intergovernmental character that gives support to peace efforts in countries affected by conflict.⁴⁷

John Paul Lederach, worldwide recognised researcher in the field of peacebuilding, contributed too to the development of the term. In his view, peacebuilding must go beyond the reconstruction following a peace agreement, as it is

a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships.⁴⁸

According to the author, society is built on three distinct levels of leadership that can, in turn, be tied to different peacebuilding approaches. Published in 1997, Lederach's conceptual framework was outlined in the form of a pyramid.⁴⁹

Level one is that of top leadership, where all high-profile actors stand, such as the heads of the government and the military, and in which, most commonly, the conflict is not as strongly felt. Therein, the tendency is to recur to negotiated "top-down"⁵⁰ solutions to terminate the conflict.

In between, level two comprehends the middle-range leadership, in other words, respected individuals engaged in various societal sectors who, although not as visible as those at the top, are well connected to both other levels. At this rank, it is common to

⁴⁷ United Nations (online), n.d., *United Nations Peace Building Commission*.

⁴⁸ Lederach, 1997 p.20.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p.39.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.44.

organise, for instance, problem-solving workshops or conflict resolution trainings, on what it is called a “middle-out approach”.⁵¹

Finally, at the bottom, resides the grassroots leadership, which comprises people involved in local communities, such as members of indigenous organisations and leaders of refugee camps, who are evidently closer to the reality of the conflict and, as such, deal with its consequences on a daily basis.⁵² The constant fight for survival, whether due to direct or structural violence, can have two very distinct effects. On one hand, it can set aside the goal of achieving peace, since the satisfaction of basic human needs is the priority, whereas, on the other hand, can lead to the uprising of the masses on a “bottom-up approach”⁵³ to construct peace. Initiatives at the grassroots level include local peace commissions and dialogue projects between communities.⁵⁴

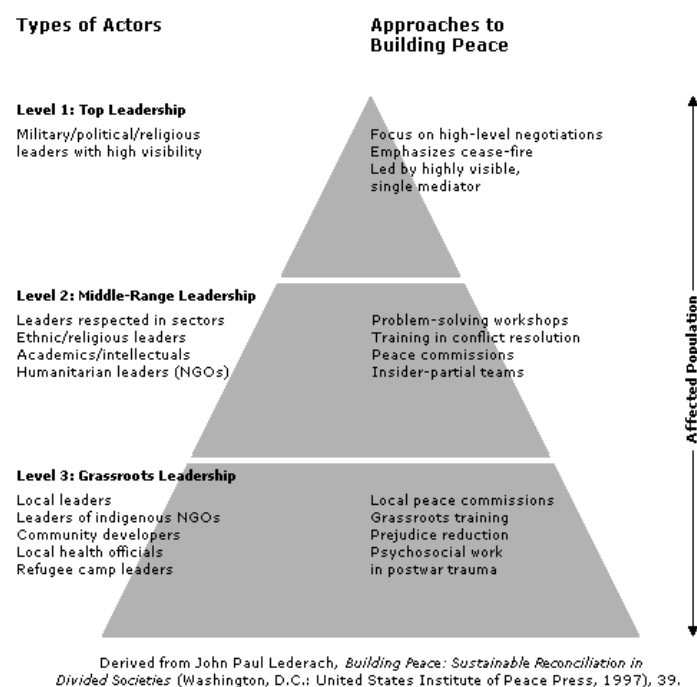


Figure 1 - Approaches to building peace (Lederach, 1997, p.39)

⁵¹ Lederach, 1997, p.46.

⁵² *ibid*, pp.37-43.

⁵³ *ibid*, p.52.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, pp.43-55.

According to Lederach, for a peacebuilding approach to truly generate transformation, it must be strived for in all three society levels at the same time, as they are all interrelated.⁵⁵

In like manner, there are several approaches on how to tackle conflict. The concept of peacebuilding is accompanied, mainly, by three schools of thought: conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation.

The first, conflict management, aims to reduce violence through means of negotiation and positive behavioural changes among the conflicting parties.⁵⁶ It is an approach that, pragmatically, perceives conflict as a phenomenon often not easy to resolve and, as such, seeks to control and reduce violence in the short-term. The key actors are then those who have the power and the ability to reach a negotiated peace, namely, the top leadership of the involved factions. Critics to the conflict management school include precisely its exclusive focus on high-profile actors, the way it implies the control of people as if they were objects and the fact that it does not address the root causes of the conflict.⁵⁷

Conflict resolution, on the other hand, not only seeks to reshape the broken relationships between the parties but, also, to resolve the rooted sources of the conflict. In accordance, it has evolved to be a civil society and grassroots approach, which often resorts to initiatives, such as dialogue projects, to encourage the establishment of healthy and positive relations among the opposing factions.⁵⁸ From a conflict management angle, conflict resolution is criticised due to the fact that constructively enhancing the communication between groups does not, necessarily, result in an accord to end the conflict.⁵⁹

The third school, conflict transformation, differs from the previous two as it is built on the ideas of both. Lederach, its greatest advocate, sought to “resolve the dilemma between short-term conflict management and long-term relationship building, as well as the resolution of the underlying causes of conflict”.⁶⁰ The outcome was a critical and

⁵⁵ Lederach, 2001.

⁵⁶ McCandless et al., 2007, Fisher et al., 2000, cited in: UNICEF, 2011, p.15.

⁵⁷ Paffenholz, 2009, p.3.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.4.

⁵⁹ Bercovitch, 1984, cited in: Paffenholz, 2009, p.4.

⁶⁰ Paffenholz, 2009, p.4.

alternative approach that provides a deeper understanding of the conflict's nature. In Lederach's words,

Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships.⁶¹

It is, accordingly, the most comprehensive of all three approaches and that which truly aims to bring about positive peace, for it empowers individuals to use the energy generated by conflict to spawn creative processes of change in all the human experience dimensions: personal, relational, structural and cultural.⁶²

Ergo, a transformational approach seeks to lessen the negative effects of conflict by praising the potential of every individual to grow on a physical, emotional and spiritual level (personal);⁶³ promoting better communication and understanding between people (relational); addressing the root causes of violence and upholding the satisfaction of basic human needs (structural); and, finally, identifying the patterns within a culture that may fuel violence as well as those which can help boosting constructive change (cultural).⁶⁴

Furthermore, within the transformational approach, Lederach developed a comprehensive framework with three components that can be interpreted as three different lenses.⁶⁵

The American scholar has proposed a first lens to observe the immediate situation of the conflict, one to examine its context as well as the relationships within it and a third lens that allows one to “envision a framework that holds these together and creates a platform to address the content, the context, and the structure of the relationship”.⁶⁶ Individually,

⁶¹ Lederach, 2003a, p.14.

⁶² Lederach, 2003b.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Lederach & Maiese, 2009, p.7.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, pp.7-8.

one lens brings to focus only one particular facet of reality, whereas the three of them combined allow for a perception of the conflict as a whole.⁶⁷

Accordingly, the three components, which correspond to different stages of review, are: the presenting situation; the horizon of preferred future; and the development of change processes linking the two.⁶⁸

The first concerns the conflict episode that has come to light and entails much deeper roots. The so-called “presenting issues”⁶⁹ mirror past occurrences and, as such, may lead to a better understanding of the conflict’s content and relationship patterns. The second stage focuses on what is desired for the future, functioning as a set of coordinates in the development of change. Finally, the third inquiry is where short and long-term solutions for constructive change are proposed. Therein, the goal is to develop and sustain tools that will end the destructive features of the conflict and foster positive ones.⁷⁰

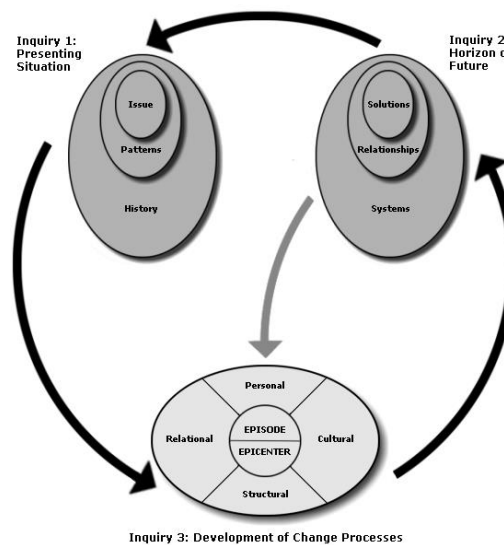


Figure 2 - The big picture of Conflict Resolution (Lederach & Maiese, 2009, p.9)

As the above image portrays, the transformational process is not linear or circular but a combination of both, for all things are connected and interdependent.⁷¹ Transforming a

⁶⁷ Lederach & Maiese, 2009, p.7.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, pp.7-8.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p.8.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, pp.7-8.

⁷¹ *ibid*, p.9.

conflict is, therefore, a complex endeavour that requires a commitment from all members of society and an understanding that goes deeper than the issues that lay in the surface. Peace education can play a vital role in enabling precisely that.

1.3. Peace Education

Peace education, broadly defined, is the cornerstone of a culture of peace.

Michael Wessells (1994, p.43)

To better understand how powerful peace education can be, it is essential to, first, reflect on the importance of education itself.

World War II was a period of great devastation and human rights abuses. “To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”,⁷² in 1945, the United Nations came officially into existence, with the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco, California. Three years later, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed and recognised, under Article 26, the right to education, as it can and “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”.⁷³

In 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), of a binding nature, reaffirmed and secured, under Article 13, “the right of everyone to education”⁷⁴ and so did Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁷⁵ Moreover, in 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) was signed in Jomtien, Thailand, recalling that

education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance, and

⁷² United Nations (UN), 1945.

⁷³ UNGA, A/RES/3/217A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, Art. 26.

⁷⁴ UNGA, A/RES/21/2200, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 16 December 1966, Art. 13.

⁷⁵ UNGA, A/RES/44/25, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, Art. 28 and 29.

international cooperation.⁷⁶

In spite of the progress such documents have propelled, the fundamental human right to education is far from being a reality for all. According to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as of the beginning of the millennium, there were over 800 million illiterate adults and almost 100 million children (of primary school age) deprived from education.⁷⁷

To counter that reality, in 2000, the universalisation of primary education was set as one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon by all UN member states and to be achieved by 2015. In addition, that same year, at the World Education Forum, in Senegal, 164 countries signed the Dakar Framework for Action, a document which encompassed a set of six education for all (EFA) goals to be achieved also in a period of 15 years.⁷⁸

To follow the progress of the latter, UNESCO created the EFA Global Monitoring Reports (GMRs), which have provided detailed assessments and analysis of great use to governments and civil society around the globe.⁷⁹

The GMR published in 2015, the year of the deadline, revealed progress when it comes to universal primary education, EFA's paramount indicator, but not the achievement of the goal. Although an increase in the global primary adjusted net enrolment ratio was verified over the years (reaching 91% in 2015), as of 2012, there were still 58 million children in the world not attending school.⁸⁰

Nonetheless, both the Dakar Framework for Action and the Millennium Development Goals were initiatives to praise and to serve as examples for future ones, as they both revealed a strong commitment from most nations towards a more fair and sustainable world.

⁷⁶ World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), 1990.

⁷⁷ Matsuura, 2000.

⁷⁸ UNESCO, 2000, p.8.

⁷⁹ Bokova, 2015, p.ii.

⁸⁰ UNESCO, 2015, p.6.

Accordingly, in 2015, a new set of goals was adopted by the UN member-states under the name of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among the 17 points, designed to eradicate poverty and ensure peace, is quality education, for it is “one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development”.⁸¹

In other words, education has been universally recognised as a fundamental human right essential to the fulfilment of all other rights. As once said by Nelson Mandela, it is “the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”,⁸² for better or for worse. If misused, it may perpetuate violence in all its forms, whilst, if based on the values inherent to a culture of peace, it can enable and propel positive change. That is what an education for peace strives for.

Much like the concepts aforementioned, peace education has no universal definition. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) refers to it as

the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level.⁸³

In fewer words, Ian Harris, President of the International Peace Research Association Foundation (IPRAF), has described it as a discipline that aims to “create in the human consciousness a commitment to the ways of peace”.⁸⁴

As wars have been sprouting since time immemorial, it is no surprise that peace education is not a recent endeavour. Three important figures worth mentioning in spurring this multidisciplinary field are Maria Montessori (1870-1952), John Dewey (1859-1952) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997). The first, an Italian doctor well-known for her progressive

⁸¹ UNDP (online), n.d., *Goal 4: Quality Education*.

⁸² Mandela, n.d., quoted in: Amnesty International (online), n.d., *10 quotes on the power of human rights education*.

⁸³ Fountain, 1999, p.1.

⁸⁴ Harris, 2009, p.78.

attitude in life, developed a revolutionary educational system to enhance the potential of children to self-develop.⁸⁵ Dewey, in turn, strongly advocated that schools were to be the basis for dynamic change and should promote global understanding instead of an education based on rote learning.⁸⁶ Lastly, Paulo Freire proposed a shift to an educational system which can enable individuals to comprehend and transform their own reality, in his words, an education for “critical consciousness”.⁸⁷ For the Brazilian teacher, school is meant to be a liberating space and education a liberating tool, not instruments of indoctrination and oppression.⁸⁸

All three of these pioneering figures advocated for a student-centred education in which children are seen as human beings full of present and future potential and, inspired by them, peace educators ever since have sought to establish a system where schools work as platforms that provide learners with an understanding of a shared humanity.⁸⁹

Today, due to their effort, peace education is seen as a movement that

can collectively unify, fuel, and inspire dialog among scholars, researchers, activists, educators, government leaders, and the myriad of public peacemakers committed to creating cultures of peace throughout the world.⁹⁰

This commitment to transform practices that mirror a perception of violence as the normality is the essence of peace education and it highly reflects on a constructive approach to conflict.⁹¹ Through holistic and integrated processes of learning, programmes of this nature transfer the skills, knowledge, attitudes (KAS) and behaviours that empower individuals to act as “changemakers”.⁹²

⁸⁵ García, 2011.

⁸⁶ Howlett, 2008, pp.27-28.

⁸⁷ Freire, 1974.

⁸⁸ García, 2011.

⁸⁹ Kester, 2010; Harris, 2008, p.16-17.

⁹⁰ Lum, 2013, p. 121, cited in: Jäger, 2014, p. 3.

⁹¹ Nipkow, 2007, p. 354, cited in: Jäger, 2014, p. 3.

⁹² Jäger, 2014, p. 8.

But what KAS can these be? The Center for Peace Education of Miriam College, in The Philippines, elaborated a list of core areas of an education for peace. Based on literature review and the input of peace educators, a scheme was drawn where the key KAS and values are identified and represented as interrelated.⁹³

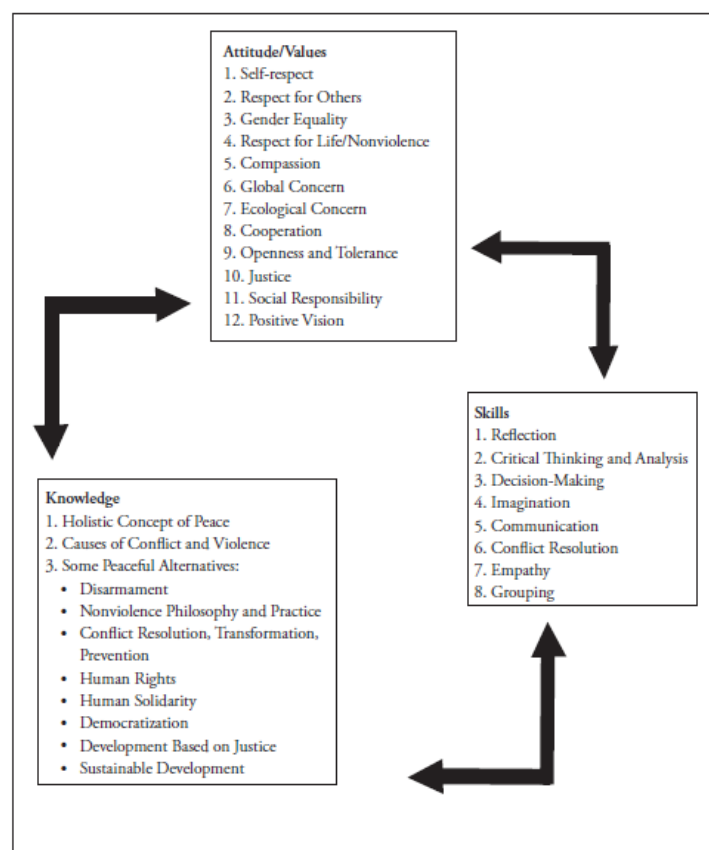


Figure 3 - Scheme of knowledge, skills and attitudes/values (Navarro-Castro & Nario-Galace, 2010, p.25)

Commonly associated with the knowledge component, human rights education has been pointed out by Betty Reardon, a renowned peace researcher, as a necessary feature to all peace education initiatives.⁹⁴

That is due to the fact that, to honour and respect the rights and freedoms all human beings share, one must first be familiar with them. One must know all the atrocities that led

⁹³ Navarro-Castro & Nario-Galace, 2010, pp.24-25.

⁹⁴ Reardon, 1997.

mankind to commit to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the forties and why it is, evermore, crucial to stand for it. In other words, an educational approach which values “human dignity, its recognition, fulfilment, and universalisation”⁹⁵ is vital to secure the absence of violence in all its forms.

Proclaimed in 2012, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training states that such an approach must encompass:

(a) Education about human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection; (b) Education through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners; (c) Education for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.⁹⁶

Accordingly, core KAS developed under this rights-based approach to education are, for instance, critical thinking, empathy and non-discrimination, all necessary for the construction of peace.⁹⁷

Complementarily, an education for citizenship is withal one of the components of peace education, for it seeks to generate in its pupils the competencies of active (global) citizens.

An educational approach of this nature may involve learning about the rule of law, democratic values and processes, civil society and participation,⁹⁸ while also providing students with an understanding of individual and communal responsibilities that empowers them to take part in the construction of a sustainable world.⁹⁹ In the words of Education Above All, it aims “to get citizens with diverse backgrounds to cooperate peacefully to ensure that the basic human rights of all are met without discrimination and

⁹⁵ Reardon, 1997.

⁹⁶ A/RES/66/137, Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 16 February 2012, Article 2 (2).

⁹⁷ Education Above All, 2012, p.16.

⁹⁸ UNESCO (online), 2010, *Citizenship Education for the 21st Century*.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

without violence”.¹⁰⁰

Fostering universal values as these, peace education is not only directed to children. Notwithstanding the fact that schools are platforms that can reach a large number of individuals and that young minds are more curious and open to change, initiatives of this kind are promoted by various agents and delivered in both formal and non-formal contexts to people of all ages, so that a greater societal transformation is achieved. In other terms, peace education programmes are not only those integrated in the national educational system, where the school teacher is the facilitator (formal),¹⁰¹ but also the ones of a more flexible nature that are delivered holistically, within and outside the classroom, to individuals of various backgrounds.¹⁰²

In fact, on the Berghof Foundation’s handbook on peace education and conflict transformation, Uli Jäger poses the question of “how much responsibility should be transferred to children in relation to the issue of peace”.¹⁰³ The author states that, in order to truly generate change, peace education programmes must involve, not only the students, but also the family, the community and, ultimately, the decision-makers.¹⁰⁴ Salomon has referred to this same idea with the expression “spreading the gospel”.¹⁰⁵ The Israeli researcher has stressed that, because the positive effects of peace education initiatives on participants are meaningful but insufficient, it is imperative to spread them to all other agents of society.¹⁰⁶ Only then, when dialogue is nourished at the heart of the community, will a culture of peace have space to grow.¹⁰⁷ It is precisely based on this premise that the present research has proposed to assess the component of community involvement on the educational model of *Escuela Nueva*, explored in detail on the final chapter of this thesis.

¹⁰⁰ Education Above All, 2012, p.16.

¹⁰¹ Robiollé, 2013, p.8.

¹⁰² Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Toolkit (online), n.d., *Non-formal education*; Carreira et al., 2014, p.25.

¹⁰³ Jäger, 2014, p.8.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Salomon, 2013, p.12.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Kester, 2010, p.3.

Furthermore, a key notion of peace education essential to the comprehension of the following chapters is that of contextualisation.

Education has been increasingly affected by armed conflict. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 50% of the world's out-of-school children (of primary school age) live in areas affected by conflict.¹⁰⁸

The reasons for such a disproportionate number are many and can be categorised as “attacks on education”, an expression defined by Human Rights Watch as all the violations that threaten the lives of children and their right to education.¹⁰⁹ Drafted in 2015, the Safe Schools Declaration illustrates some of the effects of armed conflict in education.

Worldwide, schools and universities have been bombed, shelled and burned, and children, students, teachers and academics have been killed, maimed, abducted or arbitrarily detained. Educational facilities have been used by parties to armed conflict as, inter alia, bases, barracks or detention centres. Such actions expose students and education personnel to harm, deny large numbers of children and students their right to education and so deprive communities of the foundations on which to build their future.¹¹⁰

The document, now endorsed by 65 countries, is a commitment to ensure the protection and continuation of education in times of armed conflict, in which one of the measures is to foster conflict-sensitive educational approaches,¹¹¹ for they avert feeding the conflict and seek to contribute to peace.¹¹²

Not belittling its vile consequences, armed conflict is not the only threat to human fundamental needs and freedoms. Social injustice, or structural violence, has its own share

¹⁰⁸ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) & UNICEF, 2015, p.11.

¹⁰⁹ Sheppard & Human Rights Watch, 2009.

¹¹⁰ *Safe Schools Declaration*, 2015.

¹¹¹ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (online), n.d., *Safe Schools Declaration*.

¹¹² *Safe Schools Declaration*, 2015.

of victims, of which many are children.

Education, as an institution, reflects and multiplies the socioeconomic and cultural disadvantages present in the settings it is held upon.¹¹³ Wealth, location and gender continue to present levels of great disparity among the children of the world, which inevitably leads to unequal access, participation and completion of primary and secondary schooling.

UNESCO's 2016 Global Education Report shows that, in terms of completion, there are great discrepancies between the poorest and the richest children as well as between boys and girls. In the period of 2008-2014, the rate of primary school completion in low income countries was of merely 51%, while in upper middle income nations surpassed the 90%. Within children living in low income countries, 77% of the richest contrast with 28% of the poorest having completed primary school, a number that, among the poorest girls, lowers to 25%.¹¹⁴

As a platform to transmit values and behaviours from generation to generation, education can be, as aforementioned, a social arrangement of two faces. It can promote fairness as it can perpetuate inequality, contribute to a culture of peace or feed a culture of violence.¹¹⁵ For it to halt the cycle of poverty, it is crucial that the knowledge, attitudes and skills it entrenches are those consistent with the notion of social justice. Based on this ideal, an education for peace has, thus, to take into consideration all the possible contextual variants.

According to Gavriel Salomon, Israeli proponent of peace education to whom contextualisation is essential,¹¹⁶ there are three possible scenarios that ask for different educational strategies. They are: regions of intractable conflicts, regions of interethnic tension and regions of experienced tranquillity.¹¹⁷ The first are those where there is an ongoing and enduring conflict in which it is possible to identify the opposing factions.

¹¹³ UNESCO, 2016, p.256.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, p.184.

¹¹⁵ UNICEF, 2011, p.19; Bush & Saltarelli (eds.), 2000.

¹¹⁶ Jäger, 2014, p.4.

¹¹⁷ Salomon, 2002, pp. 5-6.

The second are regions where disputes occur between ethnic groups and where a minority is, often, oppressed. Thirdly, regions of experienced tranquillity imply no particular opponents and usually host programmes of an education about peace that fosters empathy for those affected by conflicts elsewhere.¹¹⁸

Hence, the different challenges faced by peace education in different parts of the world ask for tailor-made programmes, capable of satisfying the local needs and generating true positive change. Such programmes must adopt suitable aims and approaches. For instance, Salomon has written that

a rough examination of peace education programmes around the world suggests that whereas regions of relative tranquillity emphasize education for cooperation and harmony (positive peace), promoting the idea of a general *culture of peace*, regions of conflict and tension emphasize education for violence prevention (negative peace), greater equality and practical coexistence with real adversaries, enemies, and minorities.¹¹⁹

In line with this idea, in 2011, UNICEF elaborated a literature review on the role of education in peacebuilding in which three quite recent discourses were brought to light. They are: education in emergencies, conflict-sensitive education and education and peacebuilding.¹²⁰

The first is set upon the premise that, in times of crisis, education must not be set aside as a minor preoccupation. On the contrary, “education in emergencies provides physical, psychological and cognitive protection that can sustain and save lives”.¹²¹ Whether in situations of armed conflict, generalised violence or natural disasters, among others, quality education remains a powerful tool in need to be secured.

Education as a humanitarian response aims to protect those who are most vulnerable – children and, in particular, girls – not only from violence but also from “frustration,

¹¹⁸ Salomon, 2002, pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.* p.5.

¹²⁰ UNICEF, 2011, p.7.

¹²¹ INEE (online), n.d., *Education in Emergencies*.

boredom and risk of conflict”,¹²² by functioning as a shield at the same time it functions as a motor for personal and emotional development.

The second discourse, of conflict-sensitive education, is that which takes into consideration the context of the conflict as well as the relationships between the different groups, aspiring to lessen the negative effects of the programme and maximizing the positive ones.¹²³ In accordance, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), aware of the importance of well knowing the settings in which an educational programme is meant to be implemented, has developed a set of steps to follow when working in conflict-affected areas (INEE Minimum Standards), in which assessment, response strategies, monitoring and evaluation are brought to light. The first step encompasses a comprehensive assessment of the situation of distress; the second includes a portrayal of the conflict, its impacts on education and the strategies to tackle them; the third implies a consistent monitoring of the latter; whereas the fourth involves regular and unbiased evaluations that can secure accountability and lead to the improvement of the programme’s effectiveness.¹²⁴

Notably, a conflict-sensitive education seeks to know the sources of conflict and act accordingly, under the principle of “doing no harm”.¹²⁵

An education with focus on peacebuilding, on the other hand, aims to go beyond that motto, as it ultimately seeks to contribute to the construction of peace in the broader communal level.¹²⁶ Peace education in this context promotes the knowledge, attitudes and skills that empower individuals, not only as peaceful beings, but also as key agents in building the foundations for peace.¹²⁷

Given the need for dialogue between all actors within society to succeed in peacebuilding, educational programmes for peace involving both children and adults have often been implemented to generate it. Peace education and peacebuilding are, therefore, intrinsically

¹²² Kirk, 2008, Deng, 2003, Tomlinson & Benefield, 2005, cited in: UNICEF, 2011, p.28.

¹²³ Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2013, pp.12-13.

¹²⁴ *ibid*, pp.12-15.

¹²⁵ UNICEF, 2011, p.17.

¹²⁶ *ibid*; Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2013, p.13.

¹²⁷ UNICEF, 2011, p.3.

linked, for the latter includes the former as a key component for change and the former promotes peacebuilding skills.¹²⁸

For peacebuilding initiatives to remain sustainable it is vital that attitudes towards war and violence are transformed and translated into long-term behavioural change which seek alternative solutions to armed conflict.¹²⁹

By the same token and drawing from its extended experience with children and peacebuilding, UNICEF has developed a set of competencies that empower learners as agents of peace. It suggests that an education for peace can train individuals, not only to coexist in a peaceful manner, but also to become key actors in peacebuilding or, in one word, peacebuilders.¹³⁰ To be able to do so, Elena Reilly, the author of the report, proposes the implementation of comprehensive programmes that combine “peace education, child participation and civic engagement”.¹³¹

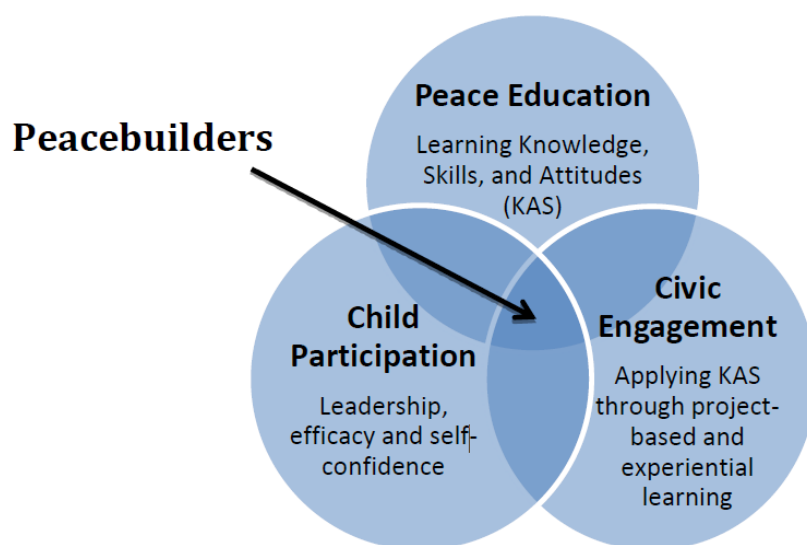


Figure 4 - Conceptualising children as peacebuilders (Reilly, 2013, p.33)

¹²⁸ Novelli & Smith, 2011, p.7, cited in: Jäger, 2014, p. 14; Kester, 2010, p.2.

¹²⁹ Insight on Conflict (online), n.d., *Peacebuilding and peace education*.

¹³⁰ Reilly, 2013, pp.2-3.

¹³¹ *ibid*, p.33.

This framework upholds that, in addition to developing the various KAS promoted by peace education, such as respect, tolerance and empathy, children as peacebuilders are confidently and actively engaged in peacebuilding activities outside the school premises.¹³² Peacebuilding competencies come, therefore, to reinforce the practical outcome of peace education.

Howard Gardner, an American developmental psychologist, has affirmed that

Education that takes seriously the ideas and intuitions of the young child is far more likely to achieve success than education that ignores these views, either considering them to be unimportant or assuming they will disappear on their own.¹³³

Accordingly, an educational approach that, ultimately, aims to raise the foundations for peace and development to flourish must acknowledge the child as a vital player in society.¹³⁴

Moreover, Reilly points to a need to supplement peace education in order to train children as peacebuilders. She suggests, for instance, that the addition of an experiential learning component to peace education initiatives can highly increase the opportunity for children as peacebuilders to participate more actively in the life of the community.¹³⁵

All that considered, the 12 competencies drafted in UNICEF's report and of great relevance for this thesis are: (1) I speak up for myself and others, (2) I resolve conflict without violence, (3) I work in a team to solve problems in my community, (4) I respect people even if they are different, (5) I know why conflict exists in my community, (6) I listen even when I disagree, (7) I analyse whether what I read, hear, or see is true, (8) I respect myself and others, (9) I believe my actions make a difference, (10) I empathise

¹³² Reilly, 2013, p.33.

¹³³ Gardner, 1991, p.248.

¹³⁴ Reilly, 2013, pp.5.

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p.34.

with others, (11) I propose solutions for a problem, and (12) I know how to assert my opinion or remain neutral.¹³⁶



Figure 5 - Draft of proposed competencies (Reilly, 2013, p.38)

Shaped as statements, the competencies are written in the first person singular so that they facilitate children's comprehension. All 12 sentences can be linked to one or more of the key suggested KAS of peace education and peacebuilding, namely, communication; problem-solving and critical thinking; respect, cooperation and teamwork; tolerance and empathy; negotiation and mediation; managing stress and emotions; and leadership, advocacy, and agency.¹³⁷

Children that can confirm all the 12 statements are, thusly, children who gather all the characteristics necessary to build a better society and a sustainable world. This thesis

¹³⁶ Reilly, 2013, p.38-40.

¹³⁷ *ibid*, p.42.

proposes to test this set of competencies through the realisation of surveys with children attending *Escuela Nueva*, establishing, therefore, a link between theory and practice, peace education and peacebuilding, an endeavour that can be found under chapter three.

This link between design and implementation is key to the assessment of peace education programmes. UNESCO has established that, in order for the evaluation of initiatives of this nature to be of relevance, it must be done in accordance with “education goals, student learning, and in service and pre-service teacher development objectives”.¹³⁸

Galtung, in turn, has gathered a set of questions that can guide an assessment, namely, “is there a dialogue that engages learners, rather than simply a message conveyed in an educational setting?; does it bring people together in a joint endeavour?; is it capable of self-generated change?”.¹³⁹

In more detail, UNICEF has published a document on the terms of reference for the evaluation of a peace education programme in Indonesia that stresses the need to address four key points: the effectiveness, relevance, sustainability and project design improvement of the initiative.¹⁴⁰

The first concerns the assessment of whether the objectives established by the programme are being achieved or not; the second determines the appropriateness of the initiative considering the settings; the third, sustainability, is important to understand if the project is to be continued; and the fourth refers to the enhancement of the content and form of the programme.¹⁴¹

In that same document, UNICEF has underlined that those in charge of the evaluation must conduct it in a meticulous and participatory way, by resorting to solid data and consulting all the agents taking part in the programme.¹⁴²

The outcomes expected from a well-executed evaluation are, thus, recommendations of

¹³⁸ UNESCO, 2016, p.201.

¹³⁹ Galtung, 2008, p.2.

¹⁴⁰ UNICEF, 2002, p.2.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

¹⁴² *ibid.*

use to make adjustments to current projects and design future ones, for only with this capability to amend can peace education programmes survive to local realities and achieve transformation.

1.4. Conclusion

From this chapter, it is vital for the reader to retain that peace and conflict are a product of intricate social dynamics¹⁴³ and, as such, demand a holistic conceptualisation.

Violence is not always visible. Often, it lies silently in social and cultural arrangements, never truly allowing for peace to be built. To prevent it from occurring, it is necessary to address its roots – those same cultural norms and structural features that justify it – and cultivate in the minds of people a culture of peace. That is an endeavour of peacebuilding and peace education, based on values such as respect, empathy and tolerance. Programmes of this nature aim to bring about positive peace, or social justice, and can involve people of all ages in all kinds of settings.

Nowadays, with all the happenings threatening human rights, such as the war on terror and the rise of populism, it is paramount that the message of peace is not only delivered but also transformed into action. After all, to build peace is in the hands of all human beings, for we are all part of the same world and share the same basic needs.

By that token, children too can be actors in the process of peacebuilding. Through a quality peace education that fosters participation and agency, they can become peacebuilders in their schools, families, communities and, even, in the world.

Overall, chapter one underlines the importance of the concept of positive peace, as the absence of violence in all its forms; determines the key role of peace education in the construction of a culture of peace; and stresses the importance of children in the process of peacebuilding. It provides, therefore, the theoretical framework that will help understanding chapter two and will be applied under chapter three.

¹⁴³ Rubinstein & Foster, 1988, p.1.

2. THE CONTEXT OF COLOMBIA

Colombia: are we at the end of a conflict or at the beginning of peace?

Emilio S. de Rojas Díaz (2017)

As stated by Lederach, in order to fully understand a “complex reality”,¹⁴⁴ such as the Colombian internal armed conflict, one must make use of all the three lenses of conflict transformation. That is to say that, in this chapter, the past will be analysed so that a desired future can be envisioned and a platform for change proposed.

In practical terms, part two of this thesis offers an overview on the evolution of the Colombian armed conflict, going through its several stages, and provides a short analyses of its peace process.

I is, at the outset, relevant to know why this research chose to focus on Colombia. In November last year, the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*, FARC-EP), signed an historical peace agreement that officially ended the longest armed conflict in the Western hemisphere. The accord, which was reviewed after the ‘no’ victory on the plebiscite of October 2, shall enact a negative peace in the country that, through the right policies, can be transformed into a positive, sustainable one. Namely, policies that favour an education that can enable forgiveness and reconciliation are crucial at this stage.

This thesis proposes that, in this context, where “repeated and deep-rooted cycles of conflict episodes ... have created destructive and violent patterns”,¹⁴⁵ in addition to a peace agreement, efforts to transform society as a whole must be pursued through education.

A fundamental notion present in the first chapter of this research is that, in order to build a sustainable peace, it is necessary to address the root causes of conflict.

¹⁴⁴ Lederach & Maiese, 2009, p.7.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.10.

Christian Wlaschütz is an Austrian political scientist and mediator with a vast experience in Colombia in the fields of reconciliation, reintegration, conflict management and conflict analysis. He has identified, in an interview with the present thesis, two factors that have been unswerving throughout the conflict. The first is political participation and access to power, while the second is the uneven distribution of land.¹⁴⁶

Ever since the independence of the country, in 1810, the political sphere in Colombia has been mostly ruled by two elite parties: the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party.¹⁴⁷ The voice of the masses and the opposition was ignored for long and, in spite of some modifications in the political system throughout the years, Wlaschütz says that, in Colombia, the opportunities to “improve oneself socially”¹⁴⁸ are still truly limited. Political exclusion has, thus, been pointed out as one of the structural features that has most visibly contributed to the conflict.

Alongside it, there is the yawning inequality in the country. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as of 2014, Colombia was the tenth most unequal country in the world in terms of family income distribution, with a GINI index of 53.5.¹⁴⁹

In turn, the uneven distribution of land has its roots in the Spanish colonisation and the feudal system it left behind.¹⁵⁰ This is a feature common to all Latin America. In fact, according to Oxfam, the region is the most unequal in the world regarding land distribution and Colombia the most unequal country in the region, with 80% of the land belonging to merely 14% of landowners.¹⁵¹ Wlaschütz has underlined that Colombia has never had an effective agrarian reform, which must comprise, not only land redistribution, but also a modification of its use, as the opening of the country’s economy led to the spreading of large-scale monocultures that have deepened the rural crisis.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

¹⁴⁷ Gillin (online), 2015, *Understanding the causes of Colombia’s conflict: political exclusion*.

¹⁴⁸ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

¹⁴⁹ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (online), n.d., *The World Factbook*.

¹⁵⁰ Gritzner, 2008, p.103.

¹⁵¹ Oxfam International, 2016, pp.21-23; Ibáñez & Muñoz, 2011, cited in: Oxfam International, 2013, p.7.

¹⁵² Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

Other aspects of the conflict are intrinsically connected to Colombia's physical landscape.¹⁵³ As pointed out by Victor Uribe, Associate Professor specialised in Latin American History and Law, "Colombia's national territory, identity, and economy have been shaped mainly by its challenging mountainous and fragmented geography".¹⁵⁴ Namely, the asymmetrical presence of the state throughout the country's regions is, for the most part, a consequence of it.¹⁵⁵

Additionally, Wlaschütz has indicated culture of violence has a structural factor in Colombia. In his words,

people are accustomed to move in a context where there is only black and white, where they think their own survival depends on the non-survival of the other. People have learned to move and live in the company of armed actors and this is devastating for any democratic system.¹⁵⁶

This perception of violence as an ordinary feature of life is not surprising. The internal armed conflict in the country sprouted in 1964 and it is estimated to have led to the death of over 220.000 people, 80% of them civilians,¹⁵⁷ and to the internal displacement of more than 7 million persons.¹⁵⁸ It was "a war deployed without limits, not between combatants, but mainly against the civilian population",¹⁵⁹ which nature and roots are hard to agree on.¹⁶⁰

2.1. The historical context of the conflict

The conflict's trigger point is commonly known as *La Violencia* ('The Violence'), a period, from 1946 to 1958, of tremendous bipartisan violence that worsened following the death of the populist Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.

Violent acts between the two traditional factions – Conservatives and Liberals – were not

¹⁵³ Rabasa & Chalk, 2001, p.23.

¹⁵⁴ Uribe, 2017, pp.33-34.

¹⁵⁵ González, 2004, p.11.

¹⁵⁶ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

¹⁵⁷ Historical Memory Group, 2016, pp. 27-39.

¹⁵⁸ Spindler (online), 2017, *Forced displacement growing in Colombia despite peace agreement*.

¹⁵⁹ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p. 26.

¹⁶⁰ González, 2004, p.11.

new in Colombia. In fact, they had been a reality in the 1800s, as well as in a good part of the XX century. However, the Conservative President elected in 1950, Laureano Gómez, was responsible for the intensification of such acts, by repressing all those in line with the ideals proposed by Gaitán in order to secure power. Thus, following the Liberal leader's assassination on April 9, 1948 (an episode known as *El Bogotazo*), many of his supporters took the streets in protest while others formed more or less organized groups to fight the Conservatives. Liberal guerrillas and peasant-farmer self-defense groups then emerged, whilst the Conservative government had on its side a paramilitary force known as the *Chulavita* police and a gang of hired assassins named *Los Pájaros* ('The Birds').¹⁶¹

The number of lives lost during *La Violencia* is not certain. According to the analyst Paul Oquist, from 1946 to 1966, there were a total of 193.017 deaths due to violence between the two political factions.¹⁶²

What is not arguable, however, is the viciousness of many of the acts perpetrated by both sides. Macabre rituals, such as the display of heads alongside rural roads, became common and Colombia reached a point of complete chaos. Repression and violence were at their peak.

To put an end to it, a military *coup* was supported by moderates from both parties, leading General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla to take office in 1953. With a mandate to achieve peace, his military government offered amnesty to both the Liberal guerrillas and the peasant-farmer self-defense groups, which only the first accepted. In response to the refusal of the latter, the General carried out multiple military actions against them, launching a new stream of violence. By 1957, his diminishing attitude towards both traditional parties led them to cooperate in order to oust him from power.¹⁶³

According to the Historical Memory Group, a research cluster created under the auspices of the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation of Colombia (*Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación*, CNRR),¹⁶⁴ the conflict may be better

¹⁶¹ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.118.

¹⁶² Oquist, 1978, p.322, cited in: Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.121.

¹⁶³ González, 2004, p.12.

¹⁶⁴ Alcalá & Uribe, 2016.

understood if divided in four different periods. The first, and the longest, goes from 1958 to 1982 and places the focus on the formation of the guerrillas; the second, from 1982 to 1996, explores the role of other armed actors, namely, the paramilitary groups and the drug-traffickers; the third, from 1996 to 2002, amounts to the bloodiest period of all; and, finally, the last one, from 2005 to 2012, is that which revolves around the weakening of the insurgencies and the demobilisation of the paramilitaries.¹⁶⁵

The first period (1958-1982)

The first period defined by the Historical Memory Group goes from 1958 to 1982 and it is the one with the longest duration of the four.¹⁶⁶ Its beginning is marked by the signing of the National Front (*Frente Nacional*) agreement, a political coalition between the two traditional parties designed to put an end to the persistent bipartisan violence.

In 1958, Alberto Lleras Camargo (1958-1962), a Liberal candidate, was elected president and began implementing strategies, not only to fight the communist self-defense groups that were still standing, but also to achieve a social reform.

Aware that one of the main root causes of *La Violencia* was the agrarian crisis, Camargo's administration developed the Agrarian Reform Law and the National Rehabilitation Plan "as strategies to drive industrial development, modernize the rural sector, improve living conditions for the rural population and strengthen democracy".¹⁶⁷

However, at the time, the world was polarized by the Cold War. On one hand, the success of socialist revolutions, such as those in China and Cuba, was seen as an opening for change, inspiring many to mobilize. On the other hand, standing on America's backyard, the Colombian government was forced to quiet the insurgencies, giving priority to the objective of eradicating Communism and putting aside that of achieving a positive social transformation.

Accordingly, in 1964, already under the administration of Guillermo Valencia León

¹⁶⁵ Historical Memory Group, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid*, p. 125.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*.

(1962-1966), a plan was designed and implemented with the purpose of destroying the “independent republics”,¹⁶⁸ territories known to be governed by the leftist self-defense groups. The Lazo Plan provided the Army with more autonomy in establishing public order¹⁶⁹ and it was within its sphere that an attack was conducted against the communist enclave of Marquetalia, Tolima, on May 27, that same year.

That was, according to Holmes et al., the episode which “provided pregnant symbolism for the birth of the FARC”,¹⁷⁰ given that, in July, the *guerrilleros* who survived the operation, including Manuel Marulanda Veléz (soon to be the leader of the guerrilla), got together with other groups of rebels to hold the First Guerrilla Conference. Therein, the communist self-defense force baptised itself as the Southern Bloc and, later, in 1966, reorganised as the FARC.

Contemporarily, other communist guerrillas started to emerge. Also in 1964, “by exploring the link between Christian theology and political activism”,¹⁷¹ the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) came into existence. Founded by Fabio Vásquez Castaño, who was trained by Fidel Castro, the ELN upheld the ideas of Che Guevara, while the FARC did so with those of Soviet influence.¹⁷²

In turn, after an ideological split within the Colombian Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Colombiano*, PCC) and the creation, in 1965, of the Communist Party of Colombia (Marxist-Leninist), the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, EPL) entered the scene two years later as the latter’s military wing.

Those groups, which in the beginning were merely acting in self-defense against a repressive Conservative government, sought to establish themselves in areas of difficult access but strategic importance. They grew slowly, as their armament was precarious and their financial resources very little. At that point in time, the armed conflict was, hence, of a marginal nature, whilst the ideological one was right at the epicentre of the country

¹⁶⁸ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.123.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*, p.127.

¹⁷⁰ Holmes, Piñeres & Curtin, 2008, p.53.

¹⁷¹ Edling (online), 2017, *ELN*.

¹⁷² Encyclopedia Britannica (online), 2017, *La Violencia, dictatorship, and democratic restoration*.

with the PCC gaining representation.¹⁷³

During the administration of Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966-1970), the guerrillas were too busy fighting each other over territorial control and dealing with their internal problems to represent an actual threat, fact that led the President to focus on policies that would develop the country's economy. Accordingly, in an attempt to deepen the agrarian reform initiated during Camargo's presidency, Lleras Restrepo established the National Association of Peasant Users (*Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos De Colombia*, ANUC), the one organization that managed, at least for a certain period of time, to "articulate autonomously the demands of the peasants on a national scale".¹⁷⁴ In fact, by the end of the presidency of Lleras Restrepo, the Colombian economy was better than ever before.¹⁷⁵

In the seventies, another insurgent group emerged as a response to the alleged fraudulent elections of 1970 that crowned Misael Pastrana Borrero (1970-1974) as the chief of state in detriment of the National Popular Alliance (*Alianza Nacional Popular*, ANAPO) candidate.¹⁷⁶ The 19th of April Movement (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*, M-19), founded mostly by young students and former members of the PCC and the FARC, saw in dauntless militant actions and big propaganda gestures the way to get their voices heard.

At that time, the discontentment with the National Front's institutional arrangement was felt by many and, ultimately, a reform became a common rationale among various sectors.¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Pastrana Borrero continued ruling the country, making recurrent use of repression against all those who mobilized.

Four National Front presidents later, in 1974, the political coalition reached its end and all indicated that a more open system would take place. At that time, however, new problems began to sprout in Colombia. While the cocaine trade erupted, with the emergence of the cartel of Medellín and that of Cali, the national economy suffered a

¹⁷³ Historical Memory Group, 2016, pp. 133-134.

¹⁷⁴ Zamosc, 2006, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica (online), 2017, *La Violencia, dictatorship, and democratic restoration*.

¹⁷⁶ Bejarano & Leongómez, 2002, p.13.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*, p.14.

significant blow, leading to an increase of protests across the country. In fact, in 1977, a major civic strike was organized by the three biggest trade union associations and heavily punished by the Armed Forces.¹⁷⁸

A year later, Julio César Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) was elected president and initiated a crackdown on the insurgents through the draconian National Security Statute (*Estatuto de Seguridad Nacional*), which gave more autonomy to the Army and inspired the formation of dangerous vigilante groups.

“For the first time, counterinsurgent operations affected daily life in the cities ... and Colombia began to receive more attention from the international human rights movement”.¹⁷⁹

All this brought along a “new phase of guerrilla expansion”.¹⁸⁰ The FARC, in particular, began to grow considerably and, in 1982, at the VII Guerrilla Conference, officially announced the mutation of its defensive strategy into an offensive one, embodied by the addition of ‘People’s Army’ (*Ejército del Pueblo*, EP) to the guerrilla’s name.¹⁸¹

Ergo, the eighties had arrived and, by then, all actors took the stage to perform in what would be a very traumatic decade for Colombia.

The second period (1982-1996)

The second period begins with the election of Belisario Betancur Cuartas (1982-1986) as the President of Colombia, in 1982, and his attempt to negotiate peace. Influenced by Jimmy Carter’s human rights policy, Betancur sought to handle public order by acknowledging the rebels¹⁸² and initiating peace talks with the FARC under a “broad agenda”.¹⁸³

Still, his administration was to be marked by “extremes of violence that tested Colombia’s

¹⁷⁸ Hylton, 2006, p.62.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*, p.63.

¹⁸⁰ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.141.

¹⁸¹ Hylton, 2006, p.65.

¹⁸² Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.141.

¹⁸³ García-Peña, 2004, p.64.

long-term commitment to democracy”.¹⁸⁴ From the beginning, the Conservative leader failed to gain the support of important sectors of society, such as the Catholic Church, the military and the regional elites, a factor that discredited the whole process.¹⁸⁵ In fact, the two latter turned their support to the paramilitary groups instead, the first through armament and training whilst the second through financial aid.

To further complicate the matter, the Patriotic Union (*Union Patriótica*, UP), a party created through the *La Uribe* Accord, in March of 1984, with the intent of allowing FARC-EP rebels to legally join politics, was exterminated by means of a “political genocide”¹⁸⁶ that killed close to 3.000 members of the party.¹⁸⁷

Those uninterrupted killings, alongside with that of the Minister of Justice by individuals linked to drug-trafficking and the seizure of the Palace of Justice by the M-19 in 1985, were proof of the government's inefficiency in countering terrorist deeds.¹⁸⁸ Betancur had no alternative, then, but to terminate the talks the year before new presidential elections.

Nonetheless, his administration did succeed in establishing “three pillars that would guide future administrations: talks with the guerrillas, political reforms and social and economic relief”.¹⁸⁹ It also further incorporated human rights in the government's agenda by inaugurating the office of the Presidential Counsellor for Human Rights.¹⁹⁰

In August of 1986, Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986-1990) took office and, despite the limitations left from the previous attempt, he too proposed peace. However, he found himself ruling an unruly country. Not only the guerrillas had become more violent, by combining “all forms of struggle”,¹⁹¹ but also did the paramilitaries and the drug-trafficking groups. The latter, mostly the Medellín cartel, led by Pablo Escobar, started a terror campaign to gain more bargaining power with the state,¹⁹² thus making homicide

¹⁸⁴ McGreevey (online), 2017, *The growth of drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare*.

¹⁸⁵ García-Peña, 2004, p.64.

¹⁸⁶ Gómez-Suárez, 2007.

¹⁸⁷ Dudley, 2004, cited in: Sanín, Acevedo & Viatela, 2007, p.24.

¹⁸⁸ McGreevey (online), 2017, *The growth of drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare*.

¹⁸⁹ García- Peña, 2004, p.64.

¹⁹⁰ Romero, 2010, p.156.

¹⁹¹ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.142.

¹⁹² Kline (online), 2017, *The growth of drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare*.

the number one cause of death in the country. At that time, cocaine trade had become the major form of financing both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries.

Barco was, nevertheless, determined to reach an agreement with the rebel forces and he did so with the M-19. The urban guerrilla agreed to lay down weapons and join politics,¹⁹³ namely, to convert their movement into the M-19 Democratic Alliance (*Alianza Democrática M-19*) party.

Towards the end of his mandate, the crisis worsened and, in 1990, the presidential elections were preceded by many assassinations, including the one of Luis Carlos Galán, the leading candidate, who strongly supported the extradition of drug-traffickers to the United States. In May, César Gaviria Trujillo was elected and, following those same hard-line anti-drugs policies, sought to address the abiding violence in Colombia.¹⁹⁴

In his first years in office, Gaviria negotiated with the EPL, which partly demobilised to form the party Hope, Peace and Liberty (*Esperanza, Paz y Libertad*), and, backed by various sectors of society, called for a Constituent Assembly to replace the Constitution of 1886.

The result was the proclamation, in July of 1991, of the New Political Constitution of Colombia, which was seen as

a peace agreement and navigational chart for the transition towards a society based on peaceful coexistence, a State of Law, the strengthening of a participatory democracy, guarantees of political rights and respect for Human Rights.¹⁹⁵

Ironically, the first elections under the new Constitution were marked by great controversy. In 1994, Ernesto Samper Pizano (1994-1998) became the President of Colombia, despite the accusations of having received money from the Cali cartel to fund his campaign.

¹⁹³ García- Peña, 2004, p.65.

¹⁹⁴ Kline (online), 2017, *The growth of drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare*.

¹⁹⁵ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.156.

Lacking credibility, his administration did nothing to restore peace in Colombia. On the contrary, during Samper's term, the level of violence in the country increased significantly.

The third period (1996-2005)

From 1996 to 2005, the conflict became "a war of blood and fire for land, territory and local power".¹⁹⁶ Violence reached its climax and thousands of civilians were victimised.

In power, Samper supported paramilitary forces by issuing a decree in which the groups they formed under the name of *Convivirs* were legitimised as "special surveillance and private security services".¹⁹⁷ In consequence, in 1997, different groups of this nature came together to form the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Auto-Defesas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC), a self-entitled "political-military movement of an anti-subversive nature acting from the legitimate right to self-defense".¹⁹⁸

In turn, in 1998, the Conservative Andrés Pastrana Arango (1998-2002) was handed over the power and set two main points on his agenda: to establish new peace talks with the FARC-EP rebels and to challenge the traditional political system.¹⁹⁹

The first was materialized on January 9, 1999, with the official start of the turbulent negotiations with the guerrilla in El Cáguan. By the end of the year, a programme of 12 points, in which agrarian reform and human rights were included, had been approved.²⁰⁰ For the rebels, three aspects were of the utmost importance for the agreement: the exchange of prisoners between them and the Army, a strong offensive by the government against the paramilitary groups and, thirdly, the safeguarding of the demilitarized zone.²⁰¹

However, actions from both sides contradicting the settlement made it become extremely fragile. The FARC-EP continued to make use of kidnapping and extortion to finance their fight, while accusing the government of not acting against the paramilitaries. In addition,

¹⁹⁶ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.162.

¹⁹⁷ Ramírez, 2011, p. 52.

¹⁹⁸ El Tiempo (online), 1997, *Paramilitares se habrían unido*.

¹⁹⁹ Sanín, Acevedo & Viatela, 2007, p.26.

²⁰⁰ Hylton, 2006, p.99.

²⁰¹ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.173.

in 2000, Pastrana's administration and the one of Bill Clinton agreed on the implementation of Plan Colombia, formulated to strengthen the Colombian Armed Forces and effectively counter the illegal drug trade, a move interpreted by the FARC-EP as proof of the government's false intentions. In fact, after 9/11, Plan Colombia was reorganized into countering insurgents as well, targeting not only illegal crops and dealers, but also members and territories of the guerrillas.

In mid-September that year, the negotiations entered a pronounced crisis. The FARC-EP not only started using the demilitarised zone to hold victims of kidnapping and train its troops,²⁰² but also, on February 20, 2002, kidnapped the President of the Peace Commission of the Senate, Senator Turbay.

With no other option, that same month, succumbing to the pressure coming from within and without, President Pastrana put an official end to the negotiations with the rebels, ordering the Army to take back the demilitarised zone.

The country had, then, fallen in complete disenchantment, while staging an interplay of extremely violent acts between all armed agents that did not spare civilians amidst the “worst recession since the Great Depression”.²⁰³

The failure of the negotiations between the Pastrana administration and the FARC-EP led the public opinion to support a military solution for the war and, thus, to vote for the candidate who made such promise. Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010), a clear antagonistic figure of Pastrana, was, hence, their choice for president in 2002.

The independent politician, who had been the Governor of Antioquia between 1995 and 1997, labelled the FARC-EP as a terrorist organization and, through the introduction of the Defense and Democratic Security Policy (*Política de Seguridad Democrática*), “unleashed the greatest political, military and juridical offensive against the Colombian guerrilla in the history of the country's conflict”,²⁰⁴ while engaging in peace talks with

²⁰² Hylton, 2006, p.99.

²⁰³ Kline (online), 2017, *The growth of drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare*.

²⁰⁴ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p.185.

the paramilitaries.

Still in 2002, the latter group started a cease-fire to initiate negotiations with the government and, by July of 2003, both sides had signed the Santa Fé de Ralito Accord, an agreement on the demobilisation of all AUC members. Consequently, there was a decrease in violence carried out by paramilitary groups, which are pointed to be responsible for nearly 70% of the violence in the country over the past ten years.²⁰⁵

Nevertheless, by adopting an approach where the end justifies the means, Uribe's administration is to blame for great human rights abuses. For instance, the incentives given to the Armed Forces to obliterate the guerrillas led to criminal conducts such as dressing civilians as *guerrilleros* after killing them (known as "false positives").²⁰⁶

The fourth period (2005-2012)

In Colombia, impunity has been an endemic problem throughout the conflict.²⁰⁷ In July 2002, however, with the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to guarantee the prosecution of the most hideous crimes of all – genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity –, accountability became a matter of global concern.

In August, that same year, Colombia ratified the Statute of Rome and also a 7-year moratorium that allowed for war crimes to be excluded from the jurisdiction of The Hague Court until November 1, 2009.²⁰⁸

With the world's attention then focused on Colombia, Uribe's government sought to draft a law concerning the demobilisation of paramilitary squads that would meet the international criteria.²⁰⁹ The result was the approval, in 2005, of the Justice and Peace Law (*Ley de Justicia y Paz*), which implied reduced jail time, from 5 to 8 years, for the perpetrators of grave human rights abuses that would fully confess.

²⁰⁵ Hanson & Penna (online), n.d., *The Failure of Colombia's "Democratic Security"*.

²⁰⁶ UNGA, A/HRC/14/24/Add.2, Annex: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston, on his mission to Colombia (8–18 June 2009), 31 March 2010.

²⁰⁷ Amnesty International UK (online), 2005, *Colombia: Justice and peace law guarantees impunity*.

²⁰⁸ International Criminal Court (online), n.d., *Preliminary examination – Colombia*.

²⁰⁹ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

At the time it was adopted, several human rights organisations and experts alerted to its dubious character. Namely, Amnesty International highlighted its failure in complying with the “international standards on victims’ rights to truth, justice and reparation”.²¹⁰ Wlaschütz has described it as a “transaction between truth and justice”,²¹¹ which favoured both Uribe and the paramilitary leaders, also noting that the former Governor of Antioquia and the AUC were “ideologically very close”.²¹²

Between 2003 and 2006, it is said that 30.671 members of the paramilitary force demobilised and 18.051 weapons were handed in. However, some argue that a grand part of those who surrendered were not part of the AUC until the very last weeks preceding the demobilisation, since the number rounded the 15.000 before the process was initiated.²¹³ It is said that the paramilitaries swiftly recruited thousands of people to inflate the number and appear more powerful.

Nevertheless, the flawed Justice and Peace Law had too a positive outcome. It generated a massive wave of civil society initiatives committed to uncover the truth and expose the existing links between the paramilitary groups and the political system. As such, dozens of politicians, including Congressmen, and members of the Armed Forces were sent to jail for aiding the illegal armed groups, breathing the scandal of the so-called “parapolitics” (*parapolítica*).²¹⁴

Despite that, Uribe’s popularity never seemed to fail him and, in 2006, he got re-elected under the promises he would defeat the guerrilla and make Colombia a safer country.²¹⁵

Four years later, it was time for the former Minister of Defense to become President of Colombia. Juan Manuel Santos was elected by pledging to give continuity to Uribe's hard-line policies on security. Accordingly, the military action against the rebels was carried on, although not for long. In 2012, Santo’s administration engaged in peace talks with the

²¹⁰ Amnesty International UK (online), 2005, *Colombia: Justice and peace law guarantees impunity*.

²¹¹ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

²¹² *ibid.*

²¹³ Nussio, 2011, p.88; CNRR, 2010, cited in: Nussio, 2011, p.88; Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

²¹⁴ Nussio, 2011, p.88; Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

²¹⁵ McDermott (online), 2010, *How President Alvaro Uribe changed Colombia*.

FARC-EP in view of finding a political solution for the end of the conflict.

Thus, a new phase of negotiations began in Colombia and, with it, came the “hope, which many citizens barely dare to entertain, of a new chance to put an end to an armed conflict that has lasted [more than] half a century”.²¹⁶

2.2. The impact of the conflict on education

Children are always the most vulnerable victims of armed conflict. Often, they are caught up in the fight and forced to bare all its dreadful consequences, as forced displacement, sexual violence and recruitment.

War steals from them the sense of normality, turning their lives into emotional rollercoasters in which relationships are based on violence. In Kofi Annan’s words, “conflict and violence rob them of a secure family life, betray their trust and their hope”.²¹⁷

Colombia is no exceptional case. The internal armed conflict has victimised more than two million children, out of a total of 8.4 million registered victims.²¹⁸ For all the 52 years of war, thousands have been born and raised not knowing any other reality but that of a country where peace always seemed to be out of reach, whether in its negative or positive form.

In Colombia, forced displacement alone has impacted more than 7 million people,²¹⁹ out of which children, women and African-Colombian and indigenous peoples have been affected in a disproportionate way.²²⁰ Upon it, by leaving their homes and lands, millions of children have abandoned school, many to never return.

Bearing in mind that the conflict has been mostly felt in rural areas, where the state has a weak presence and poverty strikes the most, it is no surprise that also education has suffered to a greater extent in those areas. The Colombia Out-of-School Children

²¹⁶ Raich, 2012, p.6.

²¹⁷ Annan, 2005, p.vii.

²¹⁸ Red Nacional de Información (online), 2017, *Registro Único de Víctimas*.

²¹⁹ Spindler (online), 2017, *Forced displacement growing in Colombia despite peace agreement*.

²²⁰ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (online), n.d., *Colombia*.

Initiative (OOSCI) shows that the highest dropout rates and the worst outcomes happen in the countryside, particularly, in municipalities where there is a propensity for attacks by armed actors.²²¹

According to a report of the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF), more than 20% of the children living in rural areas, with ages between five and 16, do not attend school, while half of those who study do not go beyond the fifth grade.²²²

These numbers are alarming and suggest that an investment on an education capable of breaking Galtung's triangle of violence is not only necessary but urgent in Colombia. It is for this matter that education has been included in the peace treaty, as further developed later in this thesis.

2.3. The peace agreement

On his victory speech, in 2010, Juan Manuel Santos praised the work done by Álvaro Uribe and promised to continue with his Defense and Democratic Security Policy.²²³ However, the newly elected President soon began to assume a position unlike that of Uribe. While the former chief of state refused to acknowledge the internal armed conflict, Santos not only did so but also recognized FARC-EP's political aspirations.

In an attempt to build peace with a guerrilla that had suffered a significant crackdown, in 2011, Santo's tasked the High Commissioner for Peace, Sergio Jaramillo, with initiating secret talks with the FARC-EP.²²⁴ From February to August 2012, the first phase of the negotiations took place, first in Oslo, Norway, and then in La Havana, Cuba.

This exploratory period culminated in the signing of the General Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace (*Acuerdo General para la Terminación Del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera*), which determined the six points to be further developed. Those were: (1) the agrarian reform, (2) political participation, (3) the end of the conflict, (4) the solution to

²²¹ Justino, 2014, p.5.

²²² Bustelo, 2016, p.1.

²²³ BBC News (online), 2010, *Government candidate Santos wins Colombia election*.

²²⁴ Vulliamy (online), 2015, *Colombia: is the end in sight to the world's longest war?*.

the problem of illicit drugs, (5) the victims and (6) the implementation, verification and ratification of the accord.²²⁵

The first point in the agenda, a comprehensive agricultural policy, of great importance given the history of the conflict, was designed to fill the gap between the urban and the rural settings, by promoting the integration of the countryside as well as an equitable economic development.²²⁶ The second, on political participation and democratic openness, set the goals of activating citizenship, strengthening pluralism and breaking the existent links between politics and guns. The third focuses on the logistics behind the cease-fire, the laying down of weapons by the rebels and their reintegration into society. In turn, the fourth chapter embodies a structural solution to overcome the drug problem, which is meant to tackle all its stages: production, commercialization and consumption. The fifth, which is one of the most contentious ones, can be seen as the core point of the agenda in La Havana. It safeguards the rights of the victims to truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition, through the establishment of a Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition Commission (*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición*), a Missing Persons Search Unit (*Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas Desaparecidas*) and a Special Jurisdiction for Peace (*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz*, JEP), amongst other transitional justice mechanisms. Finally, the sixth chapter concerns the creation of tools to monitor and guarantee the implementation of the accord.²²⁷

Hence, from October 2012, with those topics on the table and with the presence of Norway and Cuba as the guarantor states and Venezuela and Chile as the accompanying ones, new talks began to carry out the uneasy task of coming up with a comprehensive written agreement.

During that period, popular participation was fomented through various mechanisms, such as the forums promoted by the National University alongside with the UN, and resulted in both parties receiving a total of 66.098 grassroots contributions.²²⁸ Two

²²⁵ *Acuerdo General para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera*, 26 August 2012.

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ Presidencia de la República, 2016, pp.28-31.

²²⁸ Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, n.d., pp.2-3.

distinctive features of this accord are worth mentioning: the role of both women and victims in the whole process. According to the UN Human Development Report of 2016, one-third of those taking part in the negotiations in La Havana were women and, that alone, means that the probability of the accord to last at least 15 years is increased by 35%.²²⁹ Likewise, 60 victims from various backgrounds were invited to the Cuban capital to participate in the talks, by sharing their stories and prospects.²³⁰

The outcome of four years of uneasy negotiations was a 297 pages document signed by the government and the FARC-EP on September 26, 2016, in Cartagena, Colombia.

Main criticisms

The ground-breaking document was naturally the source of several disagreements. The opposition, led by the former President Álvaro Uribe, has expressed its discontentment mostly regarding two aspects of the accord: political participation and punishment of the FARC-EP members. The first point concerns the possibility given to the demobilised *guerrilleros* to run for political offices. Colombians fear, and were told to fear, that the inclusion of the demobilised left-wing rebels can lead to the radicalization of politics.²³¹ In turn, the second contentious aspect bears upon accountability. Under the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, all armed actors who have committed war crimes or crimes against humanity and agree to fully recognise them will not receive prison sentences but will, instead, face an “effective restriction of liberty”,²³² from 5 to 8 years, along with mandatory community work. Accordingly, only those who fail to confess will spend time in jail, a fact that led the opposition to accuse the government of offering amnesty to the rebels.

For Wlaschütz, another problematic feature of the deal is its lack of popular input. According to the mediator, the negotiations in La Havana took place solely among actors belonging to the first level of leadership in Lederach’s pyramid,²³³ with “no two-way

²²⁹ UNDP, 2016, p.94.

²³⁰ Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, n.d., pp.2-3.

²³¹ BBC News (online), 2016, *Colombia peace deal: What are the most contentious points?*.

²³² Presidencia de La República, 2016, pp.28-31.

²³³ See page 19 of the present thesis.

communication to the other levels”.²³⁴ Peace was simply expected to trickle-down to the masses,²³⁵ when, instead, according to Lederach, to attain peace in a sustainable manner, it is necessary to extend the lenses beyond the top leadership actors and the accords they may sign.²³⁶

Moreover, one aspect that drove many to stand by the ‘no’ vote and, yet, has not been particularly mentioned by the international media, is the so-called “gender ideology”²³⁷ that, according to several opposition leaders, may lead to the “homosexualisation of society”.²³⁸ The opposition advocated that the accord diminishes the traditional family values by favouring the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) victims of the conflict.²³⁹

Colombians were, thus, extremely divided at the time of the plebiscite, perhaps not on whether they wished peace or not, but on what the meaning of peace truly is. In the words of Arlene B. Tickner, Professor of International Relations at Rosario University and a columnist for *El Espectador*,

many Colombians favor the idea of peace but not necessarily the types of political, economic, legal and social concessions that a peace agreement with the guerrillas entail.

The plebiscite

In June 2014, Juan Manuel Santos won a second term against the right-wing candidate Oscar Iván Zuluaga. The votes he received were seen as votes on the peace agreement his government had been working on with the FARC-EP and, for that matter, the outcome of the elections could have been interpreted as a legitimisation of the accord by the

²³⁴ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May; International Crisis Group, 2017, p.3.

²³⁵ Lederach, 1997, p.44.

²³⁶ Lederach, 2001, p.843.

²³⁷ International Crisis Group, 2017, p.3.

²³⁸ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

²³⁹ *ibid*; International Crisis Group, 2017, p.3.

population.²⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the President took the decision of having a national referendum on the deal.

Thus, on October 2, 2016, the Colombian people were asked to vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on the peace agreement. The day after it was signed by the FARC and the government, a Datexco poll, published by the newspaper *El Tiempo*, showed that 67,1% of the interviewees were willing to vote on the peace plebiscite and that, out of that number, 55% would vote ‘yes’.²⁴¹

For the surprise of many, however, the ‘no’ vote won by a razor-thin margin of 50,21% to 49,78%, from a turnout of less than 38%.²⁴²

One of the reasons that has been pointed out for that to have been the outcome is that many ‘yes’ supporters stayed home that Sunday, whether due to a false sense of security created by the polls or due to the heavy rains and floods provoked by Hurricane Matthew in the Caribbean Coast.

But how to explain all the ‘no’ votes? The International Crisis Group highlights the asymmetric commitment between both factions. While Uribe’s popularity and restless campaign against the peace accord guaranteed him a vast number of supporters, including right-wing conservatives and worshipers, the ‘yes’ side, led by former President Gaviria, failed to promote the agreement in an effective and unified manner.²⁴³ That, along with a perception of violence as the normality and the depth of the trauma inflicted by 52 years of conflict, has prevented many Colombians from accepting a peace accord in which the desired future implies the reconciliation with those they consider the enemy.

The revised accord

When the result of the plebiscite became known, the whole world was left to wonder what would happen next.

²⁴⁰ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

²⁴¹ El Tiempo (online), 2016, *Intención de voto por el ‘Sí’ en plebiscito está en el 55%*.

²⁴² Murphy & Cobb (online), 2016, *Colombians reject deal to end 52-year FARC rebel war*.

²⁴³ International Crisis Group, 2017, p.3.

President Santos had not foreseen the rejection of the accord, thus, there were no certainties on how to proceed next.

Nevertheless, both the government and the leader of the FARC-EP, Rodrigo Londoño, alias Timochenko, immediately pledged to continue searching for peace and to maintain the ceasefire,²⁴⁴ while thousands of people took the streets to show their support to the peace deal.

On October 7, the Friday following the plebiscite, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Juan Manuel Santos, “for his resolute efforts to bring the country's more than 50-year-long civil war to an end”.²⁴⁵ That, along with the increased trust on FARC’s commitment and the pro-peace demonstrations bursting across the country, injected a new political capital into the deal.

To revive the accord, the opposition was invited to the negotiation table in La Havana, where it presented a list of demands, and a national dialogue was opened in order to take into account the observations of the ‘no’ voters.

Forthwith, by November 24, 2016, the government and the FARC-EP signed a revised accord of 310 pages, in which, according to Tickner, were built-in “the large majority of the recommendations made by the ‘no’ supporters”.²⁴⁶

This time, though, the accord was not to be voted on by the Colombian population but by the Congress. As of the end of November, both the Senate and the House of Representatives voted for its approval and, on December 13, the Constitutional Court allowed Congress to adopt the fast-track measure, which implies fewer debates on the legislation of the deal and, consequently, allows for a faster implementation.²⁴⁷ Such measure can be justified by the urge of putting an end to the guerrilla’s situation of

²⁴⁴ BBC Mundo (online), 2016, *Plebiscito en Colombia: Timochenko dice que las FARC seguirán apostando por la paz*.

²⁴⁵ Nobel Prize (online), n.d., *The Nobel Peace Prize 2016*.

²⁴⁶ Tickner, 2017, e-mail interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 25 May.

²⁴⁷ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May.

uncertainty and, also, of boosting the process as much as possible until the presidential elections in 2018.²⁴⁸

D-Day took place on the first day of December and, from then on, the FARC-EP rebels (estimated to be between 6.000 and 7.000)²⁴⁹ had five days to reach the designated cantonment camps, where they were to stay for 175 days more.²⁵⁰ There, they were to hand-in their weapons to a UN team, register and receive trainings to prepare them for reintegrating the civilian life.

Challenges

As noted on the Capstone Doctrine, the first months following the signing of a peace treaty are essential to consolidate peace.²⁵¹ Colombia has, now, a great deal of challenges ahead. The written agreement is an impressive achievement but the implementation phase is, without a doubt, the most important one – that which can bring peace to the daily lives of the Colombian people. Poverty, uneven distribution of land, limited political participation and drug-trafficking are systemic (and endemic) concerns that need to be addressed and resolved, if an armed conflict is not to erupt once more.

In the words of Isaac Castro García, for the World Economic Forum for Latin America, peace

is a path that demands society to act, to incorporate non-violent cultural practices and transform the psychosocial dynamics that legitimize and reproduce conflict. Peace is not only about the ones in camouflage, it is not only about weapons. It is also about inequality, hunger and apathy. It is a process of collective construction and it will not be a reality until it becomes social.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Wlaschütz, 2017, interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Vienna, 26 May; International Crisis Group, 2017, p.1.

²⁴⁹ BBC News (online), 2016, *Who are the FARC?*.

²⁵⁰ Recalde (online), 2017, *Colombia's FARC to Begin 180-day Disarmament Process*.

²⁵¹ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), 2008, p.62.

²⁵² García (online), 2016, *Peace is in sight for Colombia. Reconciliation will be an even tougher fight*.

Amongst some of the undertakings to add that social asset to the peace process is that of bringing Colombians together. A country may not attain sustainability if its citizens are not willing to work side by side to achieve it. This is a long-term endeavour that has to be seen as crucial in building the foundations for peace in the country.

On a shorter term, significant challenges are, for instance, the substantial financial means necessary to implement the accord, the reintegration of the rebels, the presence of other armed actors on the ground, the war on drugs and the presidential elections of 2018.

According to Tickner, the latter can “most definitely” stall the implementation of the accord, “although it is difficult to envision a complete abandonment of the accords and a return to war”.²⁵³ On the same matter, the International Crisis Group alerts to the fact that the opposition, if victorious in the elections, can “financially starve institutions, programs or policies”²⁵⁴ included in the treaty. A major step back in this regard was the decision of Colombia’s Constitutional Court on the fast-track measure in May this year. By declaring parts of it unconstitutional, the court pronouncement may lead to the hampering of the peace treaty implementation, by prolonging the legislative debate.²⁵⁵

The third and fourth challenges aforementioned – the presence of other armed actors and the war on drugs – are interconnected. With the demobilisation of the FARC-EP, various strategic zones were abandoned, creating a security vacuum where the state has, yet, failed to strengthen its presence.²⁵⁶ Namely, successor gangs of the paramilitary movement, known as *bandas criminales*, have been occupying those territories and taking control over illegal economic activities the guerrilla once owned, such as illegal mining and drug-trafficking, thus posing a real threat to local communities.

In fact, these right-wing armed groups are said to be responsible for the assassination of a striking number of human rights and leftist activists. A report published by the Colombian Ombudsman, Carlos Alfonso Negret, shows that, between the first day of the

²⁵³ Tickner, 2017, e-mail interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 25 May.

²⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, 2017, p.i.

²⁵⁵ WOLA (online), 2017, *The past week in Colombia’s peace process*.

²⁵⁶ Alsema (online), 2017, *UN security council urges Colombia to fill power vacuums left after FARC demobilization*.

year 2016 and March 1, 2017, a total of 156 human rights defenders were murdered in the country.²⁵⁷ Moreover, according to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein, only in the first 4 months of 2017, at least 41 activists were assassinated (a number that was later denied by the Interior Minister Juan Fernando Cristo).²⁵⁸

This worrisome reality has led to raising the question of how secure the rebels will be when reintegrated in society, for the past killings of members of the Patriotic Union are not yet forgotten.²⁵⁹ In the words of a former *guerrillera*, Marcela González, “everyone, from the guerrillas to the surrounding communities, are scared about what comes next”.²⁶⁰

Education in the peace agreement

As a human right and a recognised motor towards social transformation, education has not been left out of the peace accord in Colombia. According to Dupuy, to include education in peace agreements is, in many ways, a positive step.²⁶¹ For instance, it displays the government's determination towards peacebuilding and may enhance the chances of transforming the conflict roots.²⁶²

Both in the accord signed in September and the revised version approved in November, the word ‘education’ is mentioned 26 times while ‘pedagogy’ appears 12. The accord places its focus mainly on three areas: education to ensure the reintegration of the guerrilla into society; rural education; and education to provide a better understanding of human rights and the agreement itself.²⁶³

²⁵⁷ Defensoría del Pueblo (online), 2017, *156 líderes sociales y defensores de derechos humanos han sido asesinados en los últimos 14 meses: Defensoría*.

²⁵⁸ Johnson (online), 2017, *Colombia denies UN claim 41 political activists were assassinated this year*.

²⁵⁹ Woody (online), 2017, *The last march: Colombia's most notorious rebel group is starting to disarm, but obstacles to peace still loom*.

²⁶⁰ González, 2017, interviewed by: Vyas (online), 2017, *Colombian Rebels Start Their Transition to Peace*.

²⁶¹ Dupuy, 2009.

²⁶² *ibid*.

²⁶³ Semana Educación (online), 2016, *Así se incluye la educación en el acuerdo que pone fin a la guerra*.

The first topic contemplates the development of educational and training programmes of members of the FARC-EP inside the areas of demobilisation.²⁶⁴ The second is found under the accord's first point of a comprehensive rural reform. It is intended to counter the high dropout rates in the Colombian countryside by promoting flexible models of education that can adjust to the local realities, while it also highlights the importance of free access to pre-school, basic and secondary education, among other things.²⁶⁵ The third topic, in turn, refers to the establishment of programmes that promote human rights and can provide the Colombian population with more information on the accord. Thusly, the National Plan of Education on Human Rights is meant to incorporate the final agreement as well as the final report of the Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition Commission.²⁶⁶

The second point, in particular, has been stressed by NOREF, on a December 2016 report, where it is stated that, in order to achieve sustainable peace, the Colombian government must prioritize rural education.²⁶⁷ The present thesis upholds this same idea by giving an example of a peace education programme that was initiated in the Colombian countryside in the seventies and has, ever since, strived for quality education in rural areas.

2.4. Conclusion

Colombia is a country of vast human and natural resources, which, for more than 50 years, was the stage to an armed conflict with numerous agents and volatile dynamics. The complexity of the conflict is immense and its causes are deeply rooted in all structures of society.

The path towards positive peace is not, therefore, an easy one and, surely, the peace accord is not sufficient to achieve it. It is, nevertheless, an encouraging step forward, for it is a sophisticated agreement that proposes solutions for the structural elements of the Colombian society that have fed the conflict for decades. Its implementation is significantly challenging and it requires the commitment of all Colombians and not only

²⁶⁴ Semana Educación, 2016, *Así se incluye la educación en el acuerdo que pone fin a la guerra*.

²⁶⁵ *Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera*, 24 November 2016, p.26.

²⁶⁶ *ibid*, p.190.

²⁶⁷ Bustelo, 2016, p.2.

those who have signed the accord in November. Thusly, the many tendencies that “have shaped the continuities of war”,²⁶⁸ such as inequality, poverty, corruption and concentration of land in the hands of few, must be addressed qualitatively. Only then, positive peace, as the absence of violence in all its forms, can be achieved. That is the desired future for Colombia.

In conclusion, transformation in the long-term is possible and its potential can be widely increased if it starts happening in the minds of those who still have the curiosity and openness to new realities: children. Nonetheless, a culture of peace can and must be spread to all agents of society through peacebuilding and peace education initiatives. That is why this research proposes peace education as a driver for positive peace in Colombia.

²⁶⁸ Historical Memory Group, 2016, p. 199.

3. ESCUELA NUEVA – A CASE-STUDY

We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost.

Charlie Chaplin (1940)

In this third chapter, theory is applied, as it encompasses the case-study of a pedagogical model of success in Colombia, named *Escuela Nueva* ('New School'), which has been widely spread and recognized as "an example of good practice, academically and in terms of education for citizenship and human rights".²⁶⁹

Bearing in mind the previous thoughts on how the war has affected mostly the rural areas of the country and that, even with the inaction of a negative peace, "substantial societal transformations"²⁷⁰ are needed to achieve a state of social justice,²⁷¹ this thesis chose to highlight this particular model given that it has been responsible for a "silent revolution"²⁷² towards a culture of peace in Colombia.

In a first stage, this research briefly describes the model by clarifying its mission, vision and approach, through literature review and semi-structured interviews. Secondly, it underlines the links between school, family and community, while, thirdly, it assesses, through surveys, whether or not students of *Escuela Nueva* gather the competencies of children as peacebuilders.

Ergo, this third chapter offers a practical valuation that, in combination with the theoretical framework, leads to the answers to the main research question: (1) Can peace education be a driver for positive peace in post-agreement Colombia?, as well as to the sub-questions it entails, (a) Can peace education programmes involving children lead to the active participation of all society members? and (b) Can peace education programmes

²⁶⁹ Sinclair, 2004, p.110.

²⁷⁰ Chaux & Velásquez, 2009.

²⁷¹ Galtung, 1969, p. 183.

²⁷² Colbert, n.d., interviewed by: Kamenetz, Drummond & Yenigun (online), 2017, *The One-Room Schoolhouse That's A Model For The World*.

empower children as peacebuilders?.

The interviews were conducted with three coordinators of *Fundación Escuela Nueva – Volvamos a La Gente* ('New School Foundation', FEN), while the survey was answered by a total of 14 students attending a school where the model is in function.

3.1. The *Escuela Nueva* model

Escuela Nueva is an innovative educational model created in the seventies by a group of teachers determined to change the process of learning in rural Colombia. Born based on a UNESCO-sponsored project from the sixties, named *Escuela Unitaria* ('Unitary School'),²⁷³ *Escuela Nueva* was designed to "provide complete primary school"²⁷⁴ to children living in remote areas of Colombia, where repetition and dropout rates were significantly high.

Drawn from the need for a new educational paradigm, the model was intended to go beyond the traditional ways of learning and introduce a systematic educational transformation, not only through "creative changes in the training of teachers, in administrative structures and in relations with the community"²⁷⁵ but also by placing the student at the centre of the learning process.

First implemented in the countryside, *Escuela Nueva* came through as a bottom-up approach meant to, not only improve, but humanize education,²⁷⁶ particularly in settings as challenging as multigrade low-income schools, "where more than one class group of children is taught together in the same classroom by one teacher".²⁷⁷

But what truly makes *Escuela Nueva* a revolutionary model recognised worldwide?

When it first appeared, violence in Colombia was heavily felt in the rural areas and, although there was no formal call for a peace education programme,²⁷⁸ there was a strong

²⁷³ Sinclair, 2004, p.107.

²⁷⁴ Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez & Molina, 2006, p. 266.

²⁷⁵ Sinclair, 2004, p. 108.

²⁷⁶ Rüst, 2012, p.12.

²⁷⁷ Quail & Smith, 2014, p.82.

²⁷⁸ Ramírez, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

conviction in some visionary minds, as that of Vicky Colbert, that “without basic education of quality, no country can attain peace, democracy and socio-economic development”.²⁷⁹

According to Heriberto Castro, Curriculum Development Coordinator of FEN, the model’s innovation consists, essentially, in combining, as a system, several principles of modern pedagogy that aim to improve the process of learning.²⁸⁰ Those elements include enhancing children’s self-esteem, promoting their participation and prioritising comprehension over memorisation, among others.

To better understand the approach adopted by *Escuela Nueva* to bring about a culture of peace, it is important to reflect on the four components any educational system must encompass.²⁸¹ Based on several research materials, realised by UNESCO, UNICEF and the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), among others,²⁸² FEN developed an analytical scheme which focuses on the elements of organisational structure, content, form and action.²⁸³ These are all intrinsically connected and, when in harmony, are capable of generating positive change.

The first, organisational structure, entails the framework guiding the educational model, including the connection between what happens outside and inside the classroom.²⁸⁴

In *Escuela Nueva*, it is composed by five characteristics of the model: the administrative component; the inclusion of the community; the training of teachers; the reorganised classroom; and the flexibility of its framework.²⁸⁵

The administration in *Escuela Nueva* is meant to mirror the idea of democracy in itself, for it is based on horizontal relationships and not on the vertical structure one may find in traditional educational systems. Enrique Chaux, from the University of Los Andes, has

²⁷⁹ El Colombiano Ejemplar (online), n.d., *Los creadores de finales felices*.

²⁸⁰ Castro, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

²⁸¹ Rüst, 2012, p.8.

²⁸² Accordingly, the works of Haavelsrud and Cabezudo, the Colombian Ministry of Education and the University de Los Andes have also inspired the development of the present scheme.

²⁸³ Rüst, 2012, p.8.

²⁸⁴ *ibid*.

²⁸⁵ *ibid*, pp.13-15.

stated that a “democratic climate in the institution make it more likely that democratic climate thrives in the classroom”.²⁸⁶

Adding to this element, there is that of community involvement. *Escuela Nueva* promotes the inclusion of all stakeholders in the learning process, including the families of the children and the community to which the school belongs to.²⁸⁷ Therefore, it is considered vital for the success of the model to carry out actions towards getting to know the community as well as initiatives to include the parents in the process. The latter may include the parents’ government (*Gobierno de Padres*) and the parents’ school (*Escuela de Padres*), which are, respectively, the organisation of parents in different committees to support the school according to its needs (for instance, a Committee of Sports in charge of gathering sport materials), and an initiative organised by the school to answer the parents’ interests and needs. The parents’ school aims, thusly, to provide training to the families in topics that are relevant to them, such as children’s health and agriculture.²⁸⁸

A third key characteristic of *Escuela Nueva* is the training of teachers. As a model that was launched mainly in schools where only one educator is in charge of all class groups of children – multigrade schools –, the training of teachers was set, from the beginning, as a top priority. As pointed out by Taole, from the University of Pretoria, “for teachers to play the critical role expected of them and to meet the challenging pedagogical practices in their classroom, targeted training needs to be provided”.²⁸⁹ Workshops of a participative nature for educators are, therefore, part of the strategy of *Escuela Nueva* to strengthen the whole structure of the model.²⁹⁰

Also relevant to the organisational component is the students’ centred rearrangement of the classroom. In *Escuela Nueva*, the working space acquires a new disposition. Children are not sitting in rows, with the teacher in front of them but, instead, they are organised in small circles according to their class group.²⁹¹ In addition, the classroom has learning

²⁸⁶ Chaux, 2012, cited in: Rüst, 2012, p.13.

²⁸⁷ Rüst, 2012, p.13.

²⁸⁸ Ramírez, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

²⁸⁹ Taole, 2014, p.535.

²⁹⁰ Rüst, 2012, p.14.

²⁹¹ Castro, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

corners and libraries, which children can resort to at any time, as well as “talking walls”,²⁹² where several learning materials are displayed.

Finally, the fifth element of this first organisational box is the model’s adaptability in diverse spheres, such as materials, class schedules, evaluation system and pace of the lesson.²⁹³ *Escuela Nueva* is built on the idea that all children are different and, as such, need personalised assistance.

The second component, content, refers to what is learned by the students. In terms of education for peace, this is an element of an adaptable nature, since it must be determined in accordance with the settings in which the programme is being implemented, for the collective narratives, historical memories and societal values vary from case to case.²⁹⁴ In some initiatives, as in the Learning to Abolish War model, by Betty Reardon and Alicia Cabezudo, content addresses explicitly subjects of peace studies, such as conflict resolution and transformation.²⁹⁵ In other cases, such as in *Escuela Nueva*, skills and attitudes are transferred without direct reference to those topics.

Accordingly, two distinct approaches of relevance are those of explicit and implicit peace education. Åke Bjerstedt, a Swedish peace researcher, defines the first as the “direct information on or discussion of issues of war and peace”²⁹⁶ and the second as the

expressions used instead when one thinks about the kind of education towards peaceful values and behavior that may result from experiencing and being a member of an open, gentle and dialogue-oriented society (a school characterized by cooperation and freedom from authoritarianism).²⁹⁷

In turn, Bar-Tal, Rosen and Nets-Zehngut, from the University of Tel-Aviv, explain implicit or indirect peace education as that which does not approach directly conflict-

²⁹² Castro, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

²⁹³ Rüst, 2012, p.15.

²⁹⁴ Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005, p.293.

²⁹⁵ Reardon & Cabezudo, 2002.

²⁹⁶ Bjerstedt, 1994, p.12.

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*

related topics, as its purpose and evolution. Instead, it targets “either very general themes of peace and peacemaking that do not contradict directly the culture of conflict, especially ethos of conflict, or an array of themes and skills that do not refer to conflict at all”.²⁹⁸

Thusly, in *Escuela Nueva*, peace related topics, such as conflict transformation, are not part of the curriculum but of the learning methodology.²⁹⁹ Children are not taught they should resolve their issues in a peaceful manner. Instead, they learn it from a constant practice at school

Moreover, the programme of studies in *Escuela Nueva* is of a flexible character, allowing the teacher to adjust it according to the local reality. The learning guides used by the students comply with the academic content established by the Ministry of Education,³⁰⁰ but still offer openings for activities and projects to be developed at the local level.

According to Rüst, author of *Peace Education in Escuela Nueva*, there are three main categories to stress under the content component of the model.³⁰¹ These are: education for citizenship, environmental consciousness and entrepreneurship and leadership. All combined, they generate in the children knowledge, attitudes and skills (KAS) such as participation, cooperation, plurality, responsibility, empathy and tolerance,³⁰² which empower them as key actors in the construction of a fair and sustainable world.

Some of the competencies implicit in the curriculum are categorised as XXI century skills, namely, those that prepare students for a rapidly changing world. Trilling and Fadel have identified, under this realm, the abilities of critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, initiative and self-direction, among others.³⁰³

The third component, form, is that which concerns how the content is passed on to the students, in other words being the adopted methodology. Kevin Kester, Research Assistant Professor of International Studies at Endicott College, has pointed out that many

²⁹⁸ Bar-Tal, Rosen & Nets-Zehngut, 2010, p.27.

²⁹⁹ Rüst, 2012, p.14

³⁰⁰ Center for Education Innovations (online), n.d., *Escuela Nueva*.

³⁰¹ Rüst, 2012, pp.15-16.

³⁰² *ibid.*

³⁰³ Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p.xxvi.

learning situations tend to contradict the values inherent to a culture of peace, when rote and teacher-centred.³⁰⁴ Peace education programmes, on the contrary, should promote dialogical and participatory learning. Johan Galtung has stressed that form needs to be consistent with the idea of peace itself,³⁰⁵ a thought which Kester supports, for he believes that form is, actually, the message.³⁰⁶

In accordance, in *Escuela Nueva*, this is the component which contributes the most to the establishment of a culture of peace.³⁰⁷ Here, three features of the model are highlighted: cooperative learning, the new role of the teacher and the students' government.³⁰⁸

In line with the ideas of Maria Montessori, John Dewey and Paulo Freire, one of the key assets of *Escuela Nueva* is that it is student-centred, meaning that the process of learning does not revolve around the teacher but rather around the student. Thusly, the model does not uphold the "banking system" denounced by Freire, where "the teacher teaches and the students are taught".³⁰⁹ Instead, children are the main actors in the process of learning, through participatory and cooperative work.

When efforts are structured cooperatively, there is considerable evidence that students will exert more effort to achieve (learn more, use higher-level reasoning strategies more frequently, build more complete and complex conceptual structures, and retain information learned more accurately), build more positive and supportive relationships (including relationships with diverse individuals), and develop in more healthy ways (psychological health, self-esteem, ability to manage stress and adversity).³¹⁰

In accordance, Heriberto Castro has mentioned that the relationship between the children

³⁰⁴ Kester, 2010, p.6.

³⁰⁵ Galtung, 2008, p.51.

³⁰⁶ Kester, 2010, p.3.

³⁰⁷ Rüst, 2012, p.17.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Freire, 1970, p.73.

³¹⁰ Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p.73.

is of the utmost importance.³¹¹ By sitting in round tables and working in groups on the learning guides, the students develop a sense of respect and comradeship that is needed to secure a comfortable and stimulating learning environment. In a self-paced, dialogical and autonomous matter, the children are, thusly, assembling their own knowledge.³¹²

Ergo, *Escuela Nueva* proposes a new role for educators to embody – that of facilitators and not transmitters of information. This approach abolishes the “old, paternalistic teacher-student relationship”³¹³ and embraces a new one based on dialogue and feedback.³¹⁴

At the model’s core is, furthermore, the student government, a representative body for the children that allows them to put democracy into practice. Through this curricular policy, students are encouraged to elect their own leaders and develop their own projects, which prepares them to embrace the role of active citizens,

with everything that it implies: participation, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, mutual help, responsible decisions, leadership, autonomy and the exercise of their rights, while respecting the rights of the others.³¹⁵

They learn by doing, for as Confucius said: “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand”.³¹⁶

Finally, the last component, action, must be generated by the previous three in combination. It is the one which, ultimately, transforms learning into practice. Therefore, if existent, it is intrinsically transformational.³¹⁷

In addition to the key initiatives of both the parents’ and the student governments, *Escuela Nueva* has developed a set of application activities included in the last section of the

³¹¹ Castro, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

³¹² Rüst, 2012, p.17.

³¹³ Shaul, 1970.

³¹⁴ Rüst, 2012, p.17.

³¹⁵ *ibid*, p.19

³¹⁶ Confucius, n.d., quoted in: CISV International (online), n.d., *CISV approach to learning*.

³¹⁷ Rüst, 2012, p.8.

learning guides. These are designed to promote the implementation of the competencies acquired by the children at school in their daily lives, with their families and communities. Castro has described it as “a crucial section to strengthen the relation between the school and the community”.³¹⁸ The model’s flexibility also allows for children and educators to proactively work together to identify and address the needs of the community through common projects of social and environmental nature.³¹⁹

Furthermore, the same publication by FEN indicates the three principles guiding the interaction between the aforementioned components when applied to peace education models, which can be observed in the following image.³²⁰

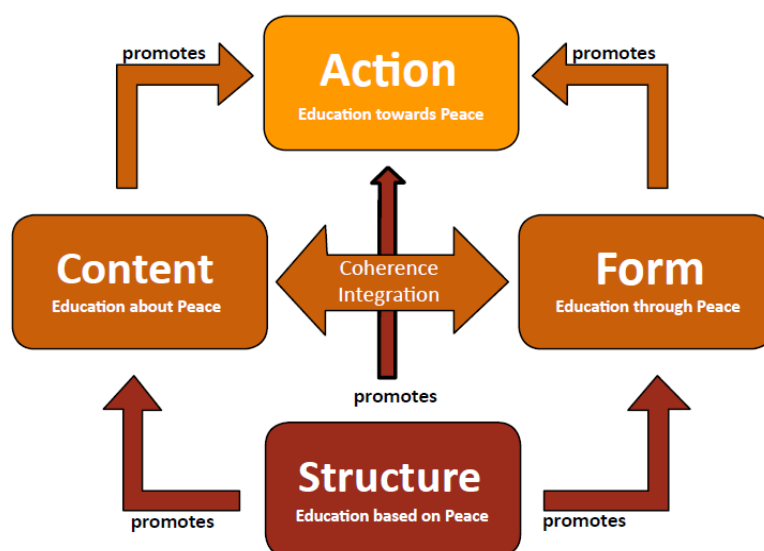


Figure 6 - Components of a Peace Education system (Rüst, 2012, p.8)

Firstly, all the four components must aim to the achievement of a culture of peace. Secondly, they must be coherent and integrated among them, for “what is taught (content) has to be applied and practiced directly within the classroom (form), and what is experienced within the classroom (form) must be explicitly converted into a subject (transforming it into content)”.³²¹ Lastly, there is the principle of potential for

³¹⁸ Castro, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

³¹⁹ Rüst, 2012, p.20.

³²⁰ *ibid*, pp.8-9.

³²¹ *ibid*.

transformation, which focuses on the action component as the one capable of validating all the others.³²²

In sum, this analytical scheme shows that an education for peace can only be conducive to change if there is a real life application of the transmitted knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Mainstreaming Escuela Nueva

As of 1976, with the support of UNICEF and USAID, as well as the recognition by the Ministry of Education, the grassroots model of *Escuela Nueva* was adopted in 500 primary schools throughout the countryside,³²³ and, by 1985, “as a national strategy to universalise primary school in rural Colombia”.³²⁴

Two years later, in order to continue developing the model and apply “its principles and pedagogy to new contexts, settings and populations”,³²⁵ Vicky Colbert, co-author of *Escuela Nueva*, founded the non-profit organisation *Fundación Escuela Nueva* (FEN), which, in that same year, supported by the Inter-American Foundation (IAF), launched a project for urban areas named *Escuela Activa Urbana* (‘Active Urban School’), now carried out in several cities in Colombia.³²⁶

Entering the XXI century, the model was adapted to emergency contexts, focusing on the reintegration of children that had been displaced due to the internal armed conflict in the country. The project, named *Círculos de Aprendizaje* (‘Learning Circles’), was first implemented in the municipality of Soacha as a pilot and, later, became an integral part of the national education policy, to “ease the transition from the streets to school”.³²⁷ In these circles of a maximum of 15 children, classes are delivered in non-formal settings, such as parishes and communal meeting places, with the assistance of a youth tutor,³²⁸ a

³²² Rüst, 2012, p.8.

³²³ Sinclair, 2004, p. 108.

³²⁴ Colbert, Chiappe & Arboleda, 1990, cited in: Sinclair, 2004, p. 108.

³²⁵ Escuela Nueva (online), n.d., *Fundación Escuela Nueva’s history*.

³²⁶ *ibid.*

³²⁷ Fundación Escuela Nueva Volvamos a La Gente (FEN), 2009.

³²⁸ Rojas, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 1 June.

local youngster who acts as a facilitator in all activities.

The project, supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and NOREF, serves, therefore, as a bridge, for it aims to prepare children to reintegrate the “mother school”³²⁹ in which they are enrolled. Most importantly, it seeks to give children their childhood and self-esteem back.

Nowadays, the *Escuela Nueva* model, designed from the start to be “cost effective, reproducible and scalable”,³³⁰ has been adopted also in secondary schools and diffused all across the globe, benefiting more than 5 million children in 14 different countries.³³¹

3.2. Can peace education programmes involving children lead to the active participation of all society members?

In order to explore the multiplier effects of the model under study and, therefore, the multiplier effects of peace education programmes, this research conducted a literature review to find the answer to the question (a) Can peace education programmes involving children lead to the active participation of all society members?.

Bearing in mind the observation drawn by Susain Fountain that “peace education should ideally involve the entire community”,³³² it is now time to focus on the achievements of *Escuela Nueva* concerning the links between school, family and community.

In 2006, Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez and Molina published a comparative study between conventional schools and *Escuelas Nuevas* where they analysed, among other aspects, the impact of the educational approach on family and community lives.³³³

For a comprehensive understanding of the linkage between school and family, the authors asked parents of children attending traditional schooling and parents of learners enrolled in *Escuelas Nuevas* to answer a questionnaire.

³²⁹ Rojas, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 1 June.

³³⁰ World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) (online), n.d., *The WISE Awards: Escuela Nueva*.

³³¹ Colbert, 2009, p.1.

³³² Fountain, 1999, p.1.

³³³ Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez & Molina, 2006, p.274.

Some of the most relevant conclusions of the research are that parents of *Escuela Nueva* students are more likely to confirm the influence of the schooling system in the way they discipline children at home and in the choice of house chores they assign them.³³⁴

In turn, Julieta Mejía and Catalina Estrada, from the University of Los Andes, have conducted a research in which they confirmed several positive effects of *Escuela Nueva* on family life, namely,

a reduction in the use of violence as a way to punish or reprimand children; an agreement through dialogue between parents and children for permissions they give to children, and the increase in parents' respect for children's free time when parents let them play or do homework assignments instead of making them do housework.³³⁵

All that together, denotes that parents of children attending *Escuela Nueva* have a higher probability of modifying their conduct due to the school's influence,³³⁶ which results in a more peaceful family environment.³³⁷ Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez and Molina affirm that that phenomenon may be justified "by the closer involvement of these parents in the activities of the school".³³⁸

Pedro Pablo Ramírez, Training Coordinator of FEN, has shared with the present thesis some of the factors favouring the integration of the families in the learning process. He has pointed out that, often, the teacher visits the households, draws information sheets on the families and organises activities to bring all stakeholders together.³³⁹ Worth recalling is the role of both the parents' government and the parents' school, which establish close links between the heads of the families and the educational institution.

Concerning community participation, Fountain has written, on a UNICEF publication,

³³⁴ Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez & Molina, 2006, pp.284-285.

³³⁵ Mejía & Estrada, 2016, in Rüst, 2012, p.25.

³³⁶ Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez & Molina, 2006, pp.284-285.

³³⁷ Mejía & Estrada, 2016, in Rüst, 2012, p.25.

³³⁸ Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez & Molina, 2006, p.284.

³³⁹ Ramírez, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

that

developing a peace education initiative with community involvement from the outset may help keep the focus on the creation of a harmonious and rights-respectful society, allay concerns about any politically motivated aims, and help to clarify the values of all stakeholders.³⁴⁰

Accordingly, the above mentioned study by Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez and Molina also sought to determine the impact of *Escuela Nueva*'s model on the community. Its conclusion in this regard was that the likelihood of parents acknowledging that the schooling system has an influence on the community's decisions for leaders and on their participation in "monitoring community projects and resources"³⁴¹ is higher when concerning *Escuela Nueva*.

One of the first comprehensive evaluations of the Colombian innovative educational method³⁴² was performed by Rojas and Castillo, in 1988. The authors conducted a qualitative research study in which, similarly to Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez and Molina,³⁴³ they compared traditional schools with those applying the *Escuela Nueva* model.³⁴⁴ One of the conclusions reached was that the latter schools were more engaged in the lives of the community.³⁴⁵

In like manner, Mejía and Estrada have concluded that the close link between the school and the parents contributes to their deeper involvement in community decisions, for instance, through the establishment of committees that work on solving local issues.³⁴⁶

In sum, in Vicky Colbert's words,

the system [of *Escuela Nueva*] promotes a partnership with teachers,

³⁴⁰ Fountain, 1999, p.4.

³⁴¹ Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez & Molina, 2006, p.286.

³⁴² McEwan, 2008, p.475.

³⁴³ Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez & Molina, 2006.

³⁴⁴ Rojas & Castillo, 1988, cited in: Forero-Pineda, Escobar-Rodríguez & Molina, 2006, pp.268-269.

³⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.268.

³⁴⁶ Mejía & Estrada, 2016, cited in: Rüst, 2012, p.26.

children and the local community. It offers parents, relatives and community at large the opportunity to participate in school activities and ensures their culture is fully valued in daily school activities.³⁴⁷

3.3. Can peace education programmes empower children as peacebuilders?

This research has now reached its most practical stage. One question that may arise in the minds of the readers is why this thesis has chosen to focus on children as peacebuilders.

Escuela Nueva has been a subject of research for several years. Peaceful coexistence, democratic behaviours, relation school-community are some of the key assets of the model that have been deeply studied and, accordingly, widely praised.

Why focusing now on children's capability of taking part in peacebuilding?

Ever since the seventies, when the project came into existence, *Escuela Nueva* has been preparing its students to live a life of peace.³⁴⁸ Fostering in them values such as respect, tolerance and empathy, the model has equipped generations of children with the characteristics of peaceful human beings. Participation, agency and leadership, however, in addition to the abovementioned values, are competencies that inspire action and that can transform children into true participants in the process of building peace.

With the official cessation of the armed conflict between the government and the FARC-EP, Colombia has now a wider margin of manoeuvre to tackle the root causes of violence in the country.

Even so, signing a peace agreement does not ensure progress in overcoming poverty, inequality and violence. Achieving a sustainable and durable peace also requires social, economic and political reforms, a culture of peace and reconciliation and widespread respect for democracy and the rule of law.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Colbert, 2009, p.3.

³⁴⁸ Ramírez, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 31 May.

³⁴⁹ IOM, 2014, p.1.

Peace education is crucial in achieving that transformation. Through the establishment of medium and long-term goals, an education for peace with a component of peacebuilding can ensure that the peace initiative in Colombia prospers and that a sustainable future is guaranteed.

Therefore, this research aims to bring to light an educational model that has been working for decades in line with all that was set in La Havana³⁵⁰ and prove it to be capable of empowering children as peacebuilders.

According to Elena Reilly, author of a 2013 report for the Adolescent Development and Participation Section of UNICEF,³⁵¹ to be able to do that, a peace education programme must include child participation and civic engagement.³⁵² The author suggests that, to train individuals as peacebuilders, peace education initiatives must be complemented with components necessary for peacebuilding.³⁵³

Peace Education	+	= Children as Peacebuilders
Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skills for Peaceful Behaviours	KAS to identify and act in order to promote peace in family, class, school, and community	Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills for Peaceful Behaviours AND taking action for peace
Tends to occur in formal and informal learning settings	Experiential learning component	Engages with community through various strategies (detailed in recommendation #3)
Seeks to improve individual's ability to resolve conflict, interact peacefully with others	Unites children in groups or teams to address issues	Focuses on collective identity formation as peacebuilders and harnesses the potential for groups of children to identify and resolve issues
Situates children as learners in a peace education process	Explicitly promotes child participation and leadership	Children as actors in the peacebuilding process

Figure 7 - Peace Education Plus (Reilly, 2013, p. 34)

From all the previous readings on *Escuela Nueva*, one can tell, by looking at the table above, that the model entails all the additional elements proposed in the middle column. It promotes a culture of peace within the family and the community; proposes initiatives

³⁵⁰ Rojas, 2017, phone interview with Isadora Martins de Freitas, Bogotá/Graz, 1 June.

³⁵¹ Reilly, 2013.

³⁵² *ibid*, p.33.

³⁵³ *ibid*.

in which children have the chance to learn by doing, such as the student government; sustains cooperative work; and, therefore, encourages children to participate and act as leaders.

Hence, the 12 competencies proposed by Reilly and present in the first chapter of this thesis are herein tested.³⁵⁴ Each of them, expressed in the form of a statement, has been interpreted by this research as linked to one or more of the knowledge, attitudes and skills (KAS) of peace education and peacebuilding.

Namely, competence number 1, 'I speak up for myself and others', encompasses one's capability of coping with conflict, by making use of one's self esteem and communication skills. Competence number 2, 'I resolve conflict without violence', reflects on the ability to deal with conflict through negotiation and mediation. Competence 3, in turn, 'I work in a team to solve problems in my community', expresses one's ability to overcome difficulties, through cooperation and teamwork. Competence number 4, 'I respect people even if they are different', covers attitudes of tolerance and empathy, while competence number 5, 'I know why conflict exists in my community', expresses one's capacity to think critically and be collectively aware. Competence number 6, 'I listen even when I disagree', also reflects tolerance and empathy, as well as respect and cooperation. Number 7, 'I analyse whether what I read, hear, or see is true', encompasses one's critical thinking skills and number 8, 'I respect myself and others', illustrates important features of a peacebuilder, such as self-esteem, respect, tolerance and empathy. In sequence, number 9, 'I believe my actions make a difference', demonstrates one's self-awareness and self-esteem, as well as leadership, advocacy and agency skills. Competence number 10, 'I empathise with others', reflects too tolerance and empathy, while number 11, 'I propose solutions for a problem', incorporates the ability to resolve challenging situations through critical thinking and, also, leadership, advocacy and agency skills. Finally, competence 12, 'I know how to assert my opinion or remain neutral', expresses self-awareness and a sense of leadership, as well as the ability to communicate assertively.

According to the abovementioned report by Elena Reilly, these KAS, written in a simple

³⁵⁴ Reilly, 2013, p.37; See pages 35 and 36 of this thesis.

and concrete way, are those inherent to a child that is, not only capable of interacting peacefully with others, but also to contribute actively in the process of peacebuilding.³⁵⁵

To test whether children attending *Escuela Nueva* have acquired the full set of competencies, this research has designed a survey composed by eight multiple choice questions and two open-end ones, in which each of them corresponds to one or two of the 12 competencies proposed by Reilly.³⁵⁶

The questionnaire was intended to be accessible to children, therefore, the language used and the examples given are age appropriate, referring to episodes that are most likely familiar to them. Following the guidelines of the UCL Research Ethics Committee concerning research involving children, this thesis requested the consent of the child and legal guardians; assured anonymity to all participants; and kept the child's best interest at its heart in all times.³⁵⁷ Children who participated did it, thusly, voluntarily and aware that no harm would come from it.

The questionnaire was sent to a school where the model of *Escuela Nueva* has been implemented in its metropolitan version (*Escuela Activa Urbana*) and answered by a total of 14 students, seven boys and seven girls, 11 from the eighth grade and three from the ninth, with ages between 13 and 16.

The survey, designed specifically for this study, consists of the following questions:³⁵⁸

1. If I see two classmates fighting with each other,
 - a. I start beating the one I like the least.
 - b. I break them up and help them reaching an agreement.
 - c. I don't get involved.

2. If the streets on my village could use some garbage picking,
 - a. I organize a team to do so.
 - b. I join a team someone else organised.
 - c. I don't get involved.

³⁵⁵ Reilly, 2013, p.3.

³⁵⁶ *ibid*, p.38.

³⁵⁷ UCL Research Ethics Committee, n.d., pp.1-2; See Annex D of the present thesis.

³⁵⁸ For the handed-out version of the survey, see Annex C of the present thesis.

3. If I see a girl or a boy from a different ethnicity falling in the playground,
 - a. I help her immediately.
 - b. I feel bad but I don't get involved.
 - c. I don't get involved.
4. When working in groups,
 - a. I defend my opinion but also listen to the others'.
 - b. I defend my opinion and ignore all the others'.
 - c. I don't give my opinion because nobody listens to me.
 - d. I express my opinion but do not defend it.
 - e. I defend the opinion of somebody else.
5. When working in groups, if a younger classmate gives his/her opinion,
 - a. I ignore him/her.
 - b. I listen to him/her.
 - c. I listen to him/her and give him/her feedback.
6. If someone is being disrespectful to myself and a friend,
 - a. I tell the person to pay some respect to both of us.
 - b. I feel unappreciated but I don't speak my mind.
 - c. I treat that person disrespectfully as well.
7. If I see something on the media,
 - a. I think it is true.
 - b. I think it might be true or false, so I research until I know.
 - c. I think it might be true or false but I don't really care.
8. If someone tells me to pick a side in a discussion,
 - a. I remain neutral.
 - b. I pick a side, just not to be stuck in the middle.
 - c. I give my opinion on the matter but I do not pick a side.
9. I believe that my actions make a difference.
 - a. True, because...
 - b. False, because...

10. In my community, sometime people fight because...

Question 1 was designed to confirm competencies 2 and 11, given that the reaction of children to a fight between classmates reflects their way of coping with conflict as well as their aptitude for proposing solutions. Question 2, in turn, assesses competencies 3 and 11, for it refers to a need of the community ('garbage picking') and it reveals children's willingness to engage in group activities and offer their own solutions. Question 3, which refers to a student from a different ethnicity falling, is linked with competencies 4 and 10, since a helping response to such an event denotes tolerance and empathy. Question 4 is meant to confirm competencies 6 and 8, for listening to others and respecting all opinions are key aspects when working in group. Question 5, in line with question 3, with reference to a classmate who has a distinct characteristic, also aims to assess competencies 4 and 10. Question number 6 describes a situation where a child and a friend feel disrespected and reflects his or her ability to express discontentment in a respectful manner, thus, assessing competencies 1 and 8. Question 7 matches the competence with the same number, for it refers to a critical analysis of what is shared on the media. The last multiple choice question, number 8, assesses, in turn, competence number 12, for it reflects children's ability to communicate their opinion or remain neutral even if under pressure. Point number 9 of the questionnaire is the exact statement of competence 9, 'I believe my actions make a difference', while the final question aims to assess competence number 5, given that it asks children to identify the main causes of conflict in their community.

Survey results

On question number one, 13 children chose option *b*, while only one child opted for *c*; on question number 2, 10 children voted *a*, 3 opted for *b* and one child chose *c*; on questions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, all 14 children chose the same options, respectively, *a*, *a*, *c*, *a* and *b*. On question 8, four children voted *a* and 10 chose option *c*. Point number 9 of the questionnaire, 'I believe my actions make a difference', was said to be true by all 14 children. The words 'leader', 'model' and/or 'example' were used by nine children to justify their responses, while other answers contain the ideas of 'all opinions matter'

(three children), ‘I do not like disputes’ (one child) and ‘I have an innovative way of thinking’ (one child). Among all the answers, words from a culture of peace lexicon have been used, such as ‘solidarity’ and ‘comradeship’, and two children have directly mentioned their capability of producing change.³⁵⁹ Finally, on the last question of the survey, on what are the sources of conflict in the children’s community, 11 of them used the words ‘tolerance’ and/or ‘lack of respect’ (as well as their variants), while two others resorted to the expressions ‘other people’s thoughts’ and ‘way of thinking’. One child, distinctively, affirmed that conflict is not common but only emerging in very specific situations. Among all the answers, in addition to previously mentioned factors, two children referred to football teams, one to alcohol and one to money.³⁶⁰

Analysis of the results

In order to analyse the data gathered, this research had to assess whether the competencies associated with each of the questions were or not confirmed by the children.

Accordingly, the answers to the first and second questions have verified the capability of 13 children to (2) resolve conflict without violence, (3) work in a team to solve problems in the community and (11) propose solutions for a problem. In turn, on question 8, with 4 students choosing option *a* and 10 option *c*, competence number 12 (I know how to assert my opinion or remain neutral) has been extended to the full group.

With the answers to questions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, all children have confirmed the following competencies: (1) I speak up for myself and others, (4) I respect people even if they are different, (6) I listen even when I disagree, (7) I analyse whether what I read, hear, or see is true, (8) I respect myself and others, and (10) I empathise with others.³⁶¹

Furthermore, the answers to question 9 have confirmed competence number 9, of acknowledging that their actions matter, while question 10 has validated competence 5, by proving that all children are willing to reflect on the sources of conflict in their

³⁵⁹ For the full answers to question 9, see Annex B of the present thesis.

³⁶⁰ For the full answers to question 10, see Annex B of the present thesis.

³⁶¹ For a table with all the results and confirmed competencies, see Annex A of the present thesis.

community.

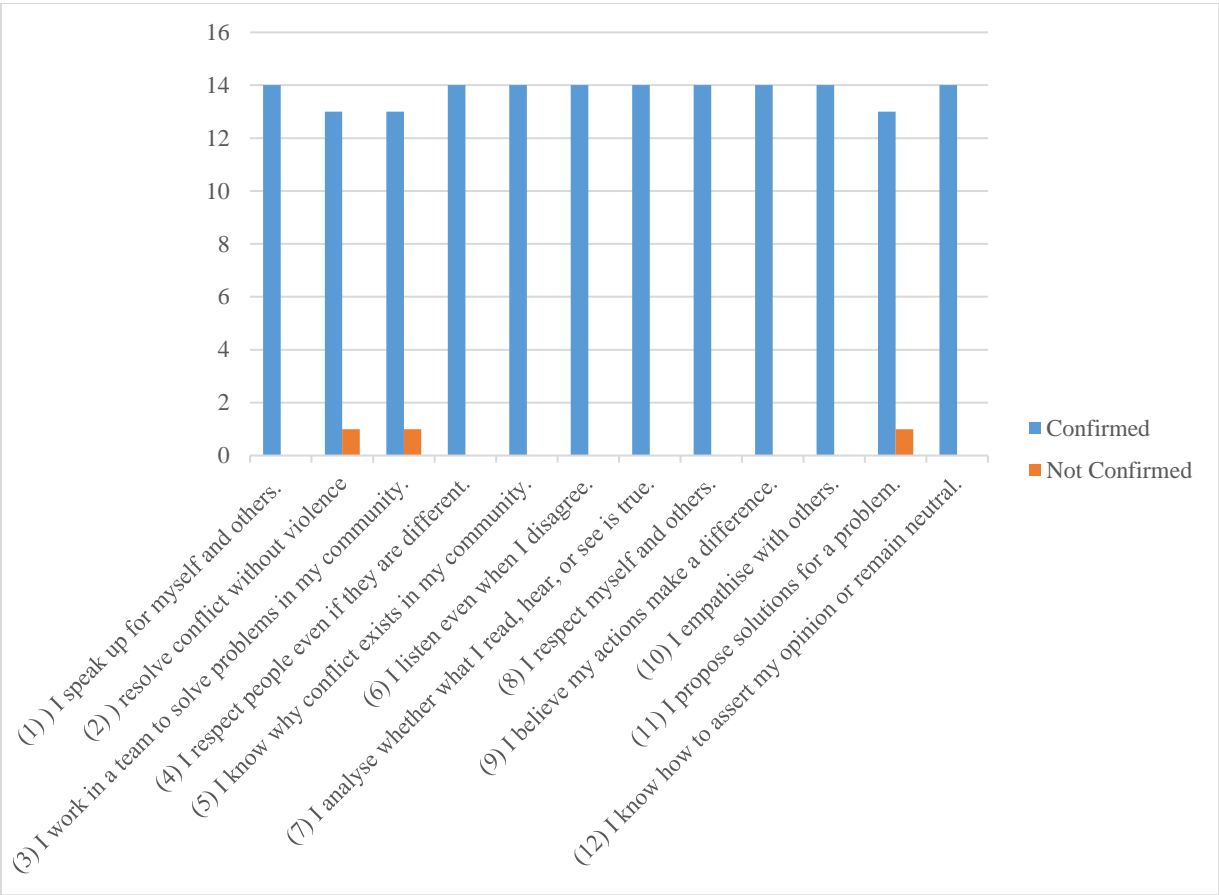


Figure 8 - Confirmation of the proposed competencies

Thusly, as portrayed on the graphic above, from a sample of 14 children, the present research has concluded that only one did not fulfil the whole set of competencies, namely, having failed to confirm those with the numbers 2, 3 and 11.

3.4. Conclusion

Escuela Nueva is an educational model that places students at its very core. Through cooperative work, dialogue and participation, it gives them the leading role in the process of learning and provides them with values inherent to a culture of peace.

As a model that seeks to contribute to positive change, *Escuela Nueva* has established effective ways of engaging multiple actors of society in the learning process, thus diffusing the notions of respect, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Given that, one can

say that the challenge proposed by Salomon of “spreading the gospel”,³⁶² by involving “parents, neighbors, friends, colleagues and such – through a process that may require society-wide motivation”,³⁶³ has been met by the model.

In fact, *Escuela Nueva* goes beyond spreading the message of peace. Through its holistic approach, it provides children with the knowledge, attitudes and skills that, not only characterise peaceful human beings, but also agents of peace, in one word, peacebuilders.

The questionnaire conducted by this thesis has shown that, of 14 students, 13 gathered all the competencies of “children as peacebuilders and leaders”.³⁶⁴ The open answers, in particular, have demonstrated that students of *Escuela Nueva* have high self-esteem and a strong sense of leadership, which are vital assets to determine their contribution to the construction of a sustainable future.

This research is aware that a sample of 14 does not mirror a population of millions but it shares the view of Mark Manson that the size of it is less relevant “as the quality of data is the measurement of its value”.³⁶⁵ Accordingly, given all the information gathered on *Escuela Nueva*, this thesis fully upholds that the model is, indeed, transformational. It sustains that the *modus operandi* of combining civic engagement, child participation and peace education, recommended by Elena Reilly,³⁶⁶ is successful in empowering children as peacebuilders.

This chapter has, thus, provided the answers to the questions initially posed: (1) Can peace education be a driver for positive peace in post-agreement Colombia?, (a) Can peace education programmes involving children lead to the active participation of all society members? and (b) Can peace education programmes empower children as peacebuilders?. All three of them are, herein, answered with a ‘yes’, for *Escuela Nueva* has been proven to be an educational model that can help in the reconstruction and reconciliation of the Colombian society through the empowerment of not only children but all stakeholders as

³⁶² Salomon, 2013, p.12.

³⁶³ *ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Reilly, 2013, p.40.

³⁶⁵ Manson, 2010.

³⁶⁶ Reilly, 2013, p.33.

agents for change.

To conclude, this thesis suggests the realisation of a longitudinal study with children attending *Escuela Nueva*, for it could provide valuable information on the long-term impact of peace education programmes with a peacebuilding component.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Colombia's conflict has sprouted due to grinding social injustice and, for 52 years, was fuelled by those same unfair features embedded in the various structures of society.

The peace accord signed in November of 2016 by the government and the FARC-EP is surely innovative and sophisticated but it is not sufficient to secure a sustainable future. The state has still major challenges ahead to ensure its implementation and having the Colombians making peace with the peace deal³⁶⁷ is, perhaps, the most urgent one.

This research has been founded upon the idea that violence is avoidable and that peace, as social justice, can be achieved if pursued through the right policies. It sustains that peace education, as a transformational multidisciplinary field capable of empowering individuals as agents for change, can be a driver towards positive peace in post-agreement Colombia.

Escuela Nueva, the educational model chosen as a case-study, confirms that hypothesis. An education for peace with a peacebuilding component can generate the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KAS) inherent to a culture of peace, training children not only as peaceful human beings but also as peacebuilders. Through a holistic approach that bases its form on the ideas of peace and democracy, *Escuela Nueva* promotes respect, tolerance, empathy, cooperative work, participation and leadership, all key KAS that characterise a responsible and caring citizen.

Notably, *Escuela Nueva*'s capacity to transform worldviews goes beyond the school walls, for it reaches also the families, the communities and, even, the decision-makers. The message of peace is spread and, little by little, it helps to replace the generalised perception of violence as the normality. The educational model is, therefore, able to contribute to the active participation of all society members, which is one of the reasons it is said to be responsible for a "silent revolution"³⁶⁸ in Colombia.

³⁶⁷ Al Jaazera (online), 2016, *The Nobel Peace Prize 2016*.

³⁶⁸ Colbert, n.d., interviewed by: Kamenetz, Drummond & Yenigun (online), 2017, *The One-Room Schoolhouse That's A Model For The World*.

To determine whether or not children attending *Escuela Nueva* gather the competencies of peacebuilders, this research has conducted a survey designed specifically for it and concluded that they do. The students of schools that follow the innovative educational model first implemented in Colombia are prepared to take part in the construction of peace in their families, communities and country.

In sum, an education for peace, alongside with reforms in the social, political and economic spheres, is indispensable to truly bring about positive peace in Colombia. For if not reflected in the lives of all citizens, “a treaty is just a piece of paper and peace is just a word”.³⁶⁹

Gabriel García Márquez, the Colombian writer awarded the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature, has once said that all his writings were inspired in real life, for the “Caribbean reality resembles the wildest imagination”.³⁷⁰ Perhaps it is time to believe that what seems to be a peace born out of that same “wildest imagination”³⁷¹ may be soon transformed into reality.

³⁶⁹ García (online), 2016, *Peace is in sight for Colombia. Reconciliation will be an even tougher fight*.

³⁷⁰ Márquez, 1981, interviewed by: Stone, 1981.

³⁷¹ *ibid.*

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ANNEXES

Annex A: Table of analysis of the surveys (questions and competencies)

	Questions	Answers	Corresponding Competency	Confirmed/ Not Confirmed
1	If I see two classmates fighting with each other,			
a	I start beating the one I like the least.	0		-
b	I break them up and help them reaching an agreement.	13	(2) I resolve conflict without violence.	C
			(11) I propose solutions for a problem.	C
c	I don't get involved.	1		NC
2	If the streets on my village could use some garbage picking,			
a	I organize a team to do so.	10	(11) I propose solutions for a problem.	C
			(3) I work in a team to solve problems in my community.	C
b	I join a team someone else organised.	3		
c	I don't get involved.	1		NC
3	If I see a girl or a boy from a different ethnicity falling in the playground,			
a	I help her immediately.	14	(4) I respect people even if they are different.	C
			(10) I empathise with others.	C
b	I feel bad but I don't get involved.	0		
c	I don't get involved.	0		-
4	When working in groups,			
a	I defend my opinion but also listen to the others'.	14	(6) I listen even when I disagree.	C
			(8) I respect myself and others.	C
b	I defend my opinion and ignore all the others'.	0		-
c	I don't give my opinion because nobody listens to me.	0		-
d	I express my opinion but do not defend it.	0		-
e	I defend the opinion of somebody else.	0		-
5	When working in groups, if a younger classmate gives his/her opinion,			
a	I ignore him/her	0		
b	I listen to him/her.	0		
c	I listen to him/her and give him/her feedback.	14	(4) I respect people even if they are different.	C
			(10) I empathise with others.	
6	If someone is being disrespectful to myself and a friend,			
a	I tell the person to pay some respect to both of us.	14	(1) I speak up for myself and others.	C
			(8) I respect myself and others.	
b	I feel unappreciated but I don't speak my mind.	0		
c	I treat that person disrespectfully as well.	0		
7	If I see something on the media,			
a	I think it is true.	0		
b	I think it might be true or false, so I research until I know.	14	(7) I analyse whether what I read, hear, or see is true.	C
c	I think it might be true or false but I don't really care	0		-
8	If someone tells me to pick a side in a discussion,			
a	I remain neutral.	4	(12) I know how to assert my opinion or remain neutral.	C
b	I pick a side, just not to be stuck in the middle.	0		-
c	I give my opinion on the matter but I do not pick a side.	10	(12) I know how to assert my opinion or remain neutral.	C

Annex B: Answers to questions 9 and 10 of the survey

9. I believe my actions make a difference.

a. True, because...

- "I am a leader with solidarity"
- "I am a leader and help the others"
- "I am an entrepreneur and leader"
- "I like to lead and, by doing things right, we can make changes"
- "I can be an example to follow"
- "I also have my opinion and it must be respected"
- "I am a person that does not like disputes, I resolve my issues and I help"
- "Every opinion counts and the people assume it is right"
- "I am an example to follow"
- "We are models to follow"
- "I can become a leader and an example"
- "I consider myself a person with solidarity and a leader that can help others"
- "By giving my opinion and experiences, I can change others' thoughts"
- "I have an innovative and of companionship way of thinking"

10. In my community, sometimes people fight because...

- "Intolerance, since we can't accept the others' opinions"
- "The football team, the way of thinking"
- "Sometimes there is no respect for the opinion of others"
- "Intolerance, disrespect make people fight"
- "Intolerance and lack of respect"
- "It is not common because they fight for specific reasons and not just because"
- "Intolerance and disrespect"
- "Lack of tolerance, respect and equality"
- "Lack of tolerance and a simple football team"
- "Intolerance"
- "There are many reasons but they all have in common the difference in points of view and intolerance towards the opinion of others"
- "People don't tolerant, respect each other; also because of alcohol"
- "Lack of respect and tolerance"
- "Money and social differences, as the thoughts of each person; also acts that may not be appreciated by someone"

Annex C: The survey



ENCUESTA

Mi grado: _____ Mi edad: _____ Mi sexo: ☐ F ☐ M

Yo empecé a estudiar en esta escuela hace _____ meses/años.

[seleccionar sólo una opción]

1. Si veo a dos compañeros que pelean, yo:

- ☐ Ataco al que me simpatice menos.
☐ Los separo y ayudo a que lleguen a un acuerdo.
☐ No me involucro.

2. Si las calles de mi barrio están sucias y podrían ser limpiadas, yo:

- ☐ Organizo a un equipo para hacerlo.
☐ Me uno a un equipo organizado por alguien más.
☐ No me involucro.

3. Si una compañera o un compañero de diferente etnia se cae en el patio de recreo, yo:

- ☐ La/lo ayudo inmediatamente.
☐ Me siento mal por ella/ello, pero no me involucro.
☐ No me involucro.

4. Cuando trabajo en grupo, yo:

- ☐ Defiendo mi opinión, pero escucho la de los demás.
☐ Defiendo mi opinión e ignoro la de los demás.
☐ No expreso mi opinión porque nadie me escucha.
☐ Expreso mi opinión, pero no la defiendo.
☐ Defiendo la opinión de alguien más.

5. Cuando trabajo en grupos, y una compañera o un compañero menor expresa su opinión, yo:

- ☐ La/lo ignoro.
☐ La/lo escucho.
☐ La/lo escucho y apporto mi opinión.

6. Si alguien le falta el respeto a un amigo y a mí, yo:

- ☐ Le pido a la persona que nos trate con respeto.
☐ Me siento rechazado, pero no digo nada.
☐ Le falto el respeto a la persona.

7. Si veo algo en las noticias, yo:

- ☐ Asumo que es verdad.
☐ Pienso que puede ser verdadero o falso, por lo que investigo para aclarar dudas.
☐ Pienso que puede ser verdadero o falso, pero no me molesto en investigar.

8. Si alguien me dice que elija un bando en una discusión, yo:

- ☐ Permanezco neutral.
☐ Elijo un bando, para no quedarme en el medio.
☐ Expreso mi opinión, pero no elijo un bando.

9. Creo que mis acciones pueden hacer la diferencia.

- ☐ Sí, porque _____
☐ No, porque _____

10. En mi comunidad, es común que la gente pelee por...



Annex D: Students and parents' consent form

CONSENT FORM

The researcher:

My name is Isadora Freitas and I am from the European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation. I am asking students of *Escuela Nueva* to be part of a research study to learn more about the educational model and its effects on children. In this study, I want to know more about peace education and all it implies.

Aim of the research:

The aim of this research is to understand to what extent innovative educational models, such as *Escuela Nueva*, can generate the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to the construction of peace.

Expected outcomes of the research:

This research wishes to prove that education can be a driver towards a Culture of Peace, by empowering children as peacebuilders.

Participants:

– Why are you being invited to be part of the research?

I am asking you to help me by participating in this research because you are a student of [name of school], the *Escuela Nueva* chosen for the study.

– What is asked from you, as a participant?

I am asking you to complete a 15 minute survey with 10 questions regarding your actions and attitudes. On the survey, you can skip any question that does not make you feel comfortable.

– Do you have to be part of the research?

No, no one forces you to participate. It is up to you.

– Do you have to sign your name on the survey?

No. You are not asked to write your name on the survey, so you will not be identified by name in any part of the research.

Will the research hurt you or help you in any way?

- No. Being part of this research will not bring you any harm and it will not help you directly. However, it will be of great help for me to learn more about peace education and *Escuela Nueva*.

Participants and guardians:

Please, if you wish to know more about this research, contact me, Isadora Freitas, at +436643288698 or isadora.freitas@gmail.com. Note that you can withdraw at any time.

Agreement:

By signing this form, you agree to be part of the research study described above.

Name of the participant:

Signature of the participant:

Signature of the guardian:

Date:

Annex E: Administrative consent form

ADMINISTRATIVE CONSENT FORM

This research is being conducted in the ambit of the European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation. The researcher name is Isadora Freitas and the thesis in question focuses on the role of peace education as a driver towards positive peace in post-agreement Colombia, in which *Escuela Nueva* is included as an example of good practice. Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand to what extent innovative peace educational models, such as *Escuela Nueva*, can generate the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to the construction of peace. If consent is given by the administration, the guardians and the participants, the students from your school will be given a 15 minute survey composed by 10 questions regarding their attitudes and behaviours in different hypothetical situations. As such, this study may contribute to a better understanding of how the model can empower children as peacebuilders.

I, _____, agree for [name of school] to participate in the study described above.

Signature of the administrator:

Date:
